PROFUSELY ILLUSTRATED BY THE BEST ARTISTS.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 400. FOR WEEK ENDING AUGUST 29TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

GRAND PIONEER REDUCTION SALE

By Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son, the well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement. Super-eminent.—The Queen's Royal Household Prudential, Eclipse, and Alarm Carpets and Hearthrugs, etc. (Reg.). Amazingly interesting, instructive, and detailed Grand Reduction Catalogue post free, if, when writing, you mention this paper.

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	Each.		Each.
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. " " "	5/11	12ft. by 12ft. " " "	12/9
9ft. by 9ft. " " "	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft. " " "	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft. " " "	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " "	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. " " "	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft. " " "	11/6	12ft. by 21ft. " " "	22/6

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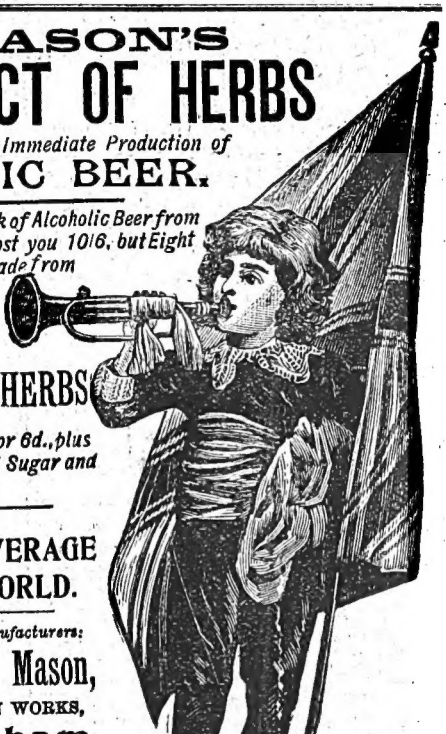

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SHORT STORIES.

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 400.] For the Week ending August 29th, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

"DID I see any fighting in Venezuela?" responded my brother, who had just returned from there, and about whose safety we had been very anxious during the last periodical revolution in that country of political unrest.

"Well, of a sort I saw plenty. It was fighting, but not war, as you would construe the term in the 42nd. If I could have had a handful of your men with me, I'd have made some of those cowardly Venezuelans sit up."

I looked at his strong, upright form, broad-shouldered and muscular, with a sigh of regret. He would have been as fine a soldier as any in the British Army. His whole heart and soul were in soldiering, not for the amusements attached to the life, but purely from the love of it, as a profession.

Unfortunately, however, at the time when he had to pass his competitive examination he failed in some subjects which I must own seemed very immaterial to the making of a good officer.

I, who am far less fitted than he, obtained my commission through a better knowledge of the art of spelling, and being more closely acquainted with the historical phases through which my country had passed in years gone by.

My brother being rejected as a servant in arms of the Queen, followed the example of many others, and travelled.

America, both North and South, had the greatest fascination for him, and he happened to be up the country when one of the so-called revolutions broke out.

"Tell me about it," I said, as we settled down to a smoke over the fire after dinner.

He watched the feathery blue rings rise in the air and vanish, placed his feet on the fender, and looked steadfastly into the crimson glow.

I fancied from his expression he was recalling something unpleasant. I waited in silence for him to begin.

"I had been travelling, as you know," he said at last, "through many of the South American States, and had a very good knowledge of Spanish. I met with a fair number of adventures, but not until I reached one of the small towns in the interior of Venezuela did I take up arms. While staying there I came across some English miners, a class you find all over the world. There was plenty of good sport, and I got to know some of the most influential inhabitants. They are supposed to hate the English, which they do collectively, but their appreciation of the race is shown by their anxiety to get them to join any one party in a scrimmage with another.

"They know an Englishman can be relied upon, whereas their own leaders cannot, though at times they will fight like demons. The people of the district were suspected, and rightly, of organising a rising against

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the government. So the latter thought it best to take the job off their hands, and send a force to quell the idea. On hearing this, a call to arms was made, and to my surprise a deputation waited upon me to request me to lend my services, and take a prominent position in the little army."

"That just suited you!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. The opportunity of getting some experience of real fighting was too much for me, and I consented!

"It didn't run to uniforms, but otherwise the equipment of our force was good.

"Drilling commenced, and in a few days we were able to move our body of men about in quite a respectable fashion. Intelligence soon came that the invading forces were at hand.

"A river divided them from us, along the banks of which I set out with a reconnoitring party. From observation and intelligence I discovered they did not exceed us in numbers, though no doubt they were far more efficient in the art of war. They encamped near the river, with the evident intention of bridging and crossing it. There was one thing to do, and one only to my mind. Attack them! The blow would be so thoroughly unexpected, that success seemed to me certain. I propounded my views, which were well received, and I was asked to carry out the attack.

"I knew the country fairly well, and arranged for the greater part of my force to cross at a ford some way above, and work round under cover of the dark.

"I determined to cross with them, having selected a picked body of a hundred strong, and take up a position under cover of the river bank.

"At daybreak our enemies would attack, when I hoped, with my men, to rush the camp. All went well as we took up our position unobserved, everything was quiet and orderly. As the first streak of dawn appeared, I hurriedly inspected my company, who were apparently ready for the fray, and nicely hidden from observation.

"As the first shot rang out on the still morning air, followed quickly by a volley, my little band rose. In accordance with my directions they started at a smart trot, without firing until they got to close quarters.

"Half the ground had been traversed, when a deadly fire from the camp poured into us, which we readily replied to.

"The bullets however kept whizzing in, and I felt suddenly that there was hesitation in my band.

"With a loud cry I dashed forward, yelling the charge, and rushing frantically into the camp. But I had not reckoned for a heavy entrenchment, which, however, I cleared only to be seized immediately, on my headlong fall the other side!

"I looked round for my men.

"Not one to be seen!

"The firing ceased. They had all bolted, right enough, too, since I had attacked an almost impregnable position. My men saw this long before my fatal leap, and also the rest of the army on the other side.

"The damage done to the foe was slight, but unfortunately for me their leader was shot.

"This incensed the soldiers beyond measure, as they surveyed their captive—a hated Englishman!

"The whole affair was laid at my door, and they clamoured loudly for my life. But the officer in charge placed me under arrest, saying he would attend to my case when the work of the day was over.

"There was a brick building in the camp, with two rooms belonging to some farmer, in one of which I was placed under strong guard.

"During the day the rebellion was quelled, and towards evening I was tried, and, no doubt very rightly, sentenced to be shot at daybreak.

"The officers, on the whole, behaved very well to me, ordering me to be supplied with food, coffee, and cigarettes.

"Gradually I began to realise the hopeless situation, seeing only too clearly my folly in taking up a cause, the merits of which I knew so little. Yet, even with the sentence of death hanging over me, the most depressing thought of all was the fact that I had made such a foolish mess of my military tactics.

"I ought not to have assumed such a position, and felt my conceit almost deserved the fate awaiting me. I really experienced at first some slight comfort in the fact that I was going to be put out of the world. At least I should be saved the derision and contempt of the men whom I had led into such a mad enterprise.

"I looked round my prison, a dull sensation of apathy at my heart. Escape through the windows seemed easy enough, but I knew too well what my reception would be without, for I could hear the steady tramp of sentinels. Even now in my dreams the regular fall of those feet outside my prison walls will wake me with a shudder.

"The thought of approaching death momentarily shaped itself more vividly in my mind. I tried to prepare for my end, but only the thought of that fatal leap and my ridiculous expedition rose to taunt me. There was no light, no consolation, no hope!

"Sounds in the adjoining room attracted my attention. It was carpentering—I listened curiously.

"When my coffee was brought in, I asked what was going on.

"The soldier, who was very communicative, told me they were putting the dead officer in a coffin, and as the custom is in hot climates, he would be buried that night.

"When again left alone, I looked at my coffee, but did not drink it. Though at first I said I felt comforted at the idea of death, I found myself clinging desperately to dear life with a wild longing.

"What if I tried the Monte Christo plan? But how would that save me? Better be shot than buried alive.

"All was still. I felt my body tremble and my pulses quicken.

"I crept stealthily across the room, and, stooping down, placed my ear to the door. Not a sound within, only grim death reigned in that silent chamber. I pushed the door open and looked through.

"There stood the coffin in solemn state, one or two forlorn looking candles guttering upon it, dimly lighting the bare walls, throwing queer shadows around.

"On the floor lay some carpenter's tools.

"A sudden thought flashed through my brain, one of daring possibilities. It seemed to brace me, and then intoxicate my mind, deadening fear, and awakening my crushed hopes.

"I placed my hand to my head, and staggered back against the door, for the room whirled round, and I seemed to discern the outlines of the coffin through a dense mist.

"Pulling myself together, I crept softly forward, and knelt down by the wooden box. What if this strange inspiration, this one last shot failed!

"I would not harbour the question, but forced it back as with eager fingers I unscrewed the coffin lid. I raised it gently, without a sound, and the livid face of the poor dead captain stared up into mine.

"To-morrow, if I could not save myself, I should be

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even as this lifeless clay, lying cold and stiff under the destroying volley.

"The haunting fear of the Eternal Unknown spurred me on to action. I was so full of life and activity, I *could* not die without a struggle. The sight of the corpse had a great effect upon me. The mystery of death was torture to my racking brain. Reverently but quickly I grasped the body in my arms, and lifting it from the rude shell, bore my ghastly burden to the adjoining room, where I laid it under the blanket that had been given to me.

"Then I returned and commenced operations, every moment fearing to be overheard.

"I took the candles off the nails in which they were stuck, and turning over the coffin lid, fastened in several long screws, being careful they did not come through. Then tying some string round them, I made a handle, about where my hands would be when lying within. It only took a few minutes to fill up the old screw holes with tallow, and rub the tops with dust, to make a very fair resemblance to the heads of the screws which had gone. Hastily replacing the candles on the nails, and the lid over the lower part of the coffin, I crept in, and with my string handles drew it over me, holding it down firmly.

"My first feeling was one of suffocation, so unbearable that my scheme already seemed impossible. 'Should I have time to make an air-hole?' I thought, 'and would it be safe if I did?' I resolved to try, and pushing my lid down, reached a large gimlet, with which I bored some holes at the side.

"A tramping of feet, and I dropped the tool, drawing the lid to its proper place.

"As the door latch turned, my heart beat violently. Had they seen it move?

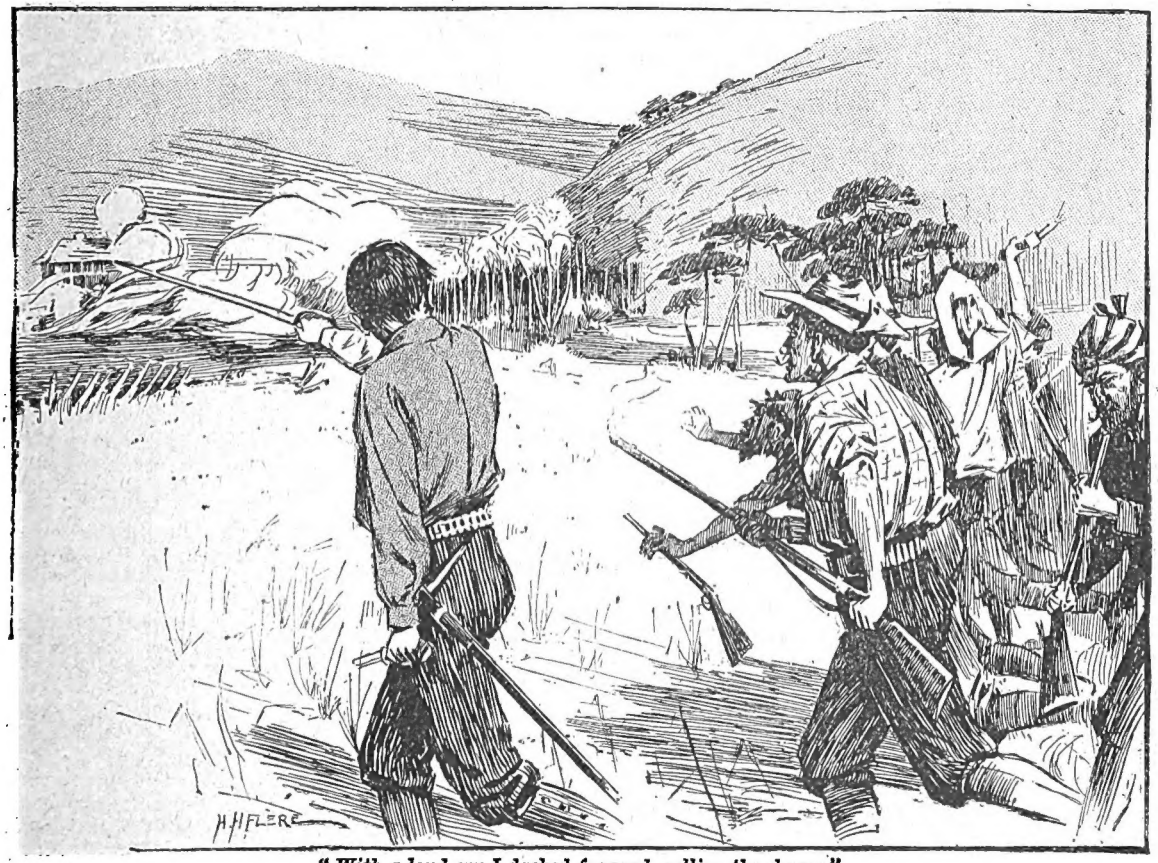
"With all my might I clung on to the lid, the muscles in my arms swelling, my teeth clenched, my breath coming quick and fast.

"That was the most agonising moment of my life, as I waited in dread suspense, all the vitality in my veins frozen with horror.

"The sound of a low, monotonous voice broke on my ear, the words brought the reality of my awful position vividly before me. The priest was blessing this mockery of death! As he ceased, the soldiers went to the door of the adjoining room. Would they discover the exchange? I heard it open and shut again, they were evidently satisfied I was asleep under my blanket. The coffin was raised, I still clung to the lid, fearing it would slip, but my grasp was so tight, that the only risk was in the string breaking.

"My feelings can be imagined, as they carried me on their shoulders, these strong men who were prepared to shoot me down like a dog at daybreak.

"I knew only too well what a wild plan I was pursuing. How mad this attempt to save myself would have seemed



"With a loud cry I dashed forward, yelling the charge."

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at any other time! But desperation and acute emergency will drive one to any lengths, and I had seen so much of the superstition of these people.

"So I clung to my wretched thread of hope, and prayed as I never did before! I did not know where I was being taken, but judging from the time it was out of the camp.

"The formula of this military night funeral was familiar to me. I should be set down at the side of the grave on the ropes that would lift and lower me, while the priest sprinkled some more holy water. Then the firing party would fire, and the earth be shovelled in.

"Before the steady march ceased, I raised my lid slightly to get a good breath of fresh air. Then an abrupt halt, and I was deposited with rather jerky motions on the ground.

"The crucial moment had arrived when a dash for freedom, life, and air, should save or end my existence! My last, my only chance, a final intreaty to the powers above, a bracing of the nerves, resolution, and then——

"I gripped my string handles tighter, and with one mighty effort dashed up the lid, shrieking wildly in Spanish: '*Io soy el espritu del su jefe, Escario!*' (I am the spirit of your leader, Escario.)

"The lid struck the men violently who stood beside the coffin, and strong soldiers as they were, for whom bullets had no terror, they started back cowering and white, consumed with superstitious dread at this weird resurrection.

"Whether they believed I was indeed their fallen chief, or a devil bursting from bonds, I know not, for in the twinkling of an eye I was away under cover of the night. Before they had time to consider, the phantom vanished, seizing the opportunity of a momentary panic.

"Thank Heaven there were no stars or moon, and if ever a man ran like the wind, I did that night."

"Dick," I cried, springing up and laying my hand on his shoulder, "old man, I congratulate you."

"Well it *was* a near shave, certainly. But fortune favoured me, and coming across some friendly miners, I lay *perdu* awhile, disguised as one of them. Eventually, as my presence proves, I got away, and I do not think that corner of the globe will ever see my face again."

W. G.

"I am the spirit of your leader, Escario!"

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The Stump of a Cigar.

I.

ALCIDES PAILLET, artist of the Latin Quarter, hurrying to an appointment with Georges Vaquier, a journalistic compatriot stopping at the Hotel de la Perle, Place de la Sorbonne, crossed the threshold, leapt the staircase, reached the third floor and knocked at door 39. No response.

"How queer!" said he. "Vaquier cannot have forgotten our rendez-vous, or can I be mistaken! This is certainly the address he gave me."

Just at that moment his eye caught sight of the key in the lock, left there by his friend, of course, expressly for him.

"Ah, 'twas all right then! Georges meant to return; while awaiting his coming he'd make himself at home."

And Paillet entered. Little curious by nature, it never occurred to him to notice the room or to remark a faint odour of patchouli that ought to have revealed to him the recent presence of a woman. Similar odours were not unusual in hotel apartments, and he crossed to the book-case where a file of books stood boldly exhibiting their backs.

"*Peste*," murmured he, running over the titles, "Georges grows frivolous of late! Formerly upon his shelves one found but volumes of jurisprudence, economy and statistics; now behold but novels and poems—'Faded Roses,' 'Always United,' 'Holes in the Moon,' etc. His Parisian sojourn has decidedly affected him. *N'importe!* we'll read awhile; here goes for 'Faded Roses!'"

And Paillet threw off his top-coat, drew from his pocket the pipe always carried with him, and was just going to light it when he saw displayed upon the mantelpiece a superb cigar, a splendid Londrés. Always thoughtful, Georges had remembered his weakness for this special brand. He took it, lighted it, rolled upon his tongue its delicious flavour, stirred up the fire a little, and contentedly plunged into his enormous heap of "Faded Roses," finding them so well suited to his taste that he gave no further thought to the delay of his friend till, arriving at the opening of the closing ode, he found some difficulty in continuing his reading.

He raised his head. Night had fallen; darkness had invaded the room. He rose, stretched himself, and wondering more than ever at Georges' absence, fished his note from his pocket, and began—to be sure he was right—to re-read its terms: "Sunday, January 14th, 2 p.m., Room 39, Hotel de la Perle, Place de la Sorbonne."

"No," said he, "I have not lost my wits, though Georges is not here. *Eh bien!* he breaks his word, and—I will stay here no longer posing like a fool!"

And so saying, Paillet threw down his cigar stump, long since burnt out, pulled on his coat again, and promptly departed, considering for a moment the advisability of leaving a note behind him registering his rage. A note? That would be very formal; a message with the *concierge* would do as well. But arriving at the lodge, the *concierge* too was out, not a servant to be found. Grumbling and vexed Paillet passed to the street and to the postal station of the Faubourg of St. Germain, to launch thence forthwith a furious telegram to his negligent friend Vaquier.

II.

MEANWHILE, as this little drama unrolled itself thus under the lone eye of Providence, a young and charming woman impatiently awaited at the Gare de l'Este the arrival of her husband, M. Claude Lamberte, domiciled with her at the Hotel de la Perle, Place de la Sorbonne. A country merchant, Lamberte came every winter, partly for business, partly for pleasure, to pass with his wife a month in Paris. To-day he had gone to lunch at Villemouble with a college chum, and his wife had profited by his absence to carry out a plan formed for a long time.

An uncle and aunt of hers lived in Paris, Rue de la Grosse-Pinte, whom certain transfers of property, insisted upon by her husband through a bit of temper, had thrown into comparative poverty. She had heard of it briefly, began at once to put aside all the economies and trifles she was able to spare, determined at the first chance that offered itself to carry them personally to her dearest relatives. That chance had come. Therefore towards two o'clock, her simple lunch and toilet finished, she had left her room, the key in the lock for the maid to arrange it, tossed her bundle into a passing *fiacre*, and departed upon her errand of affection for the Rue Grosse-Pinte. Her aunt was not at home, but the *concierge* received the bundle, and Madame Lamberte, her mind at ease, turned her steps towards the Gare de l'Este to meet her husband at five o'clock.

In fact at five minutes past five precisely the train rolled into the station. Claude sprang to the platform, kissed his wife tenderly, helped her to the carriage again, and the return was begun.

"And you had a good time, dearest," began his wife presently, a detail or two exchanged between them.

"I should say so!" Claude responded, "and grew ten years younger talking over old times and pranks, my dear. And you, Mignonne, what did you do?"

"Oh, I," said she, with a little white lie, fearing to anger him, "I stayed at home till four o'clock, then came out to meet you. It was truly a long, long day,

dearest, for a woman all alone, with no one she loved to speak to."

"Poor little darling," Claude murmured remorsefully, again embracing her fervently.

Indeed, so wrapped were they in the tenderness of this sweet reunion, that they arrived at their destination, passed into the hotel still affectionately arm-in-arm, and upstairs to room 39.

"Ah," sighed the merchant as they entered with a long relieved breath, "what a comfort to be out of that racket and hear ourselves speak once more! What say you to dining up here, Octavia, a regular bridal fête, like the lovers of other days, you know? Does the notion please you, little one?"

"Please me, Claude? How good you are!"

And Claude, under the inspiration of these tender memories and the pretty white throat of his wife, plainly visible through her half-opened corsage, felt himself seized with a renewal of love and admiration as ardent as in the first hours of the honeymoon.

Suddenly bustling about the room with his loverlike air, at once sentimental and rakish, he crossed, I know not under what impulse, towards the mantelpiece. A strong odour of tobacco smoke greeted his nostrils. He stopped, sniffed, wheeled round.

"Octavia," said he, "did you tell me that you were alone here all day long?"

"Absolutely alone."

"But someone has been smoking here?"

"Impossible."

"Smell for yourself, then: the odour is strong enough."

"True, I smell it, too. Where can it come from?" cried she wonderingly. "Perhaps——"

"Well, what else?"

"It was the bell-boy, perhaps."

"Isadore? He never smokes; he has often told me so when I have offered him cigarettes. Therefore——"

"Therefore, Claude," stammered Octavia, dazed by the mystery, "what do you mean by that? What do you want me to tell you?"

"You should know, Octavia," Claude answered sternly, assailed by cruel thoughts, and quick to pass from one extreme to another, "if, as you say, you have been here all day alone. Speak! speak!" he thundered, "where does that odour come from?"

"I will see, I will go at once and inquire, Claude——"

"No, not a step. You would still deceive me. You have received someone here; this odour could be neither chance nor fancy. The man—his name—who is he, I say?"

"No one—no one, Claude; on my soul, no one!"

"And I say, yes! Quick, answer me—his name, I tell you!"

And Octavia, in the terror that her husband's fury caused her, determined to cut the knot with a second lie.

"Please, please, Claude," cried she pleadingly, "don't be vexed with me. That odour—so little that I was sure that it would be gone by now—I did not mean to deceive you—that odour was through me. I—I disobeyed you, Claude. I smoked a cigarette to-day!"

"What? When I have positively forbidden you to?"

"Yes, Claude, but it was such a little one, and I did not think how wrong it was."

She clasped his hand and leant against him, and looked so pretty, so truly repentant for the sin she had committed, that Claude, in spite of himself, was vanquished by her gentleness.

"Well, all right, said he, "this once I pardon your levity and disregard of my wishes, but—do not do it again, Octavia!"

"Never, never," affirmed she, craftily offering herself to his kisses, and the trouble for the moment blew over by Octavia's returning to the cares of her toilet, a little delayed by this stormy episode. As for Claude, good soul, he already deplored his hasty suspicions. What had possessed him? His wife was the best, the most honest of women. How wrong he had been to wound her so. And really, after all, what harm had there been in her tasting a little of forbidden fruit?

Pacing back and forth while he awaited her dressing, reflecting thus, his foot struck something on the floor that rolled. He stooped, picked it up. Impossible! Could he believe his own eyes? That which he had in his hand—the *corps du délit*, the clinching proof of his wife's brazen treachery—was the stump of a cigar. He had not been wrong, then. She had deceived him! He was betrayed like other husbands.

"*Eh bien*, dearest," murmured just then a soft voice behind him, "hast thou no more to say, then, to thy little Octavia?"

The spell that bound him relaxed with the sound of that siren voice. No more to say to her, with every nerve of his body tense with fury? One leap took him beside her.

"See it—see it!" he cried. "Behold the 'cigarette'; such a little one, too, that made that smoke a while ago!"

Octavia stared, uncomprehending.

"See it—see it!" repeated he, shaking it and brandishing it before her eyes, "the stump of a cigar, hardly cold, here on my floor! Wretch! Answer, I say. Who—has—been—here—since I've been gone?"

"No one—no one, Claude. Ask the *concierge*."

"*Concierges* are easily corrupted."

"You believe me a liar, then, Claude?"

"I know that you are one!" and he caught her by the shoulder and crushed her to her knees, the better, perhaps, to realise her crime. She struggled, writhed in his grasp; his clutch was iron. Octavia decided it was wise to retract.

"Claude," said she solemnly, with appealing eyes, "listen one moment, and I will tell you the truth."

"You have not told the truth, then?"

"No."

"How, then, can I believe what you say?"

His wife lifted her arms upward.

"As Heaven is my witness," said she, "it is the truth I tell you now, I was not here this afternoon——"

This was too much. Claude raised his hand, and Octavia dodged, wrenched herself free, and fled from the room.

III.

SAFE in the corridor, without thought of refuge, she began to descend the stairs. The gloom and silence of the house in that mid-hour of struggle between twilight and night somewhat calmed and brought her to her senses. Where was she going when she reached the bottom, or what pretext to give the *concierge* or servants for her bonnetless head, half-buttoned *corsage*, and face pale with worry? Go back? Never! Go on? How could she? Even now someone was coming, a step near at hand, and the door beside her, opening on the landing immediately beneath her own, brusquely flew

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back, and a head, curious, interested, peered into the passage.

A young and handsome head, too, that of a gentleman, like herself, recently arrived in Paris, whose name she did not know, but with whom she and her husband had several times exchanged a word or two as they met on the stairs. Always respectful and courteous, she had begun to look upon him almost as an old acquaintance. He stared, started, recognised the pretty lady and neighbour, whose name he did not know either, and advanced to meet her.

"You are looking for a servant, madame?" said he.

The cue was given; Octavia seized it.

"Yes, monsieur, a servant, and was debating whether to go up or down. I desired some matches, you know."

"Ah, I can aid you, then; my box is full and at your service, madame. But step inside, please, the hall is so cold," and Vaquier—for Vaquier it was—drew back to allow her to pass. Octavia, confused, moved forward a step or two and began to explain:

"Her husband the merchant—monsieur remembered him—had gone for the day with a friend to Villemouble. She was alone, her room dull and dark, and"—she smiled enchantingly—"monsieur would understand, she had always been so afraid of the dark."

"And I, though not afraid, madame," Vaquier politely answered, "was dull and lonely also; a friend that I expected did not arrive. It was he that I thought I heard, when—luckily for me—I came to the door," and Vaquier's eyes completed the sentence that his lips dared not frame.

"You are alone, then, monsieur?" Octavia questioned timidly, embarrassed for a response and feeling it safer to confine herself to a *rôle* of catechising.

"Alas, yes, madame, and puzzled I am by it, too."

Vaquier assented again. "Alcides Paillet is usually the most punctual of men. But, as to-day, madame, like your husband, he plays the truant, and since Providence has thrown us together, and both of us are so dull and lonely, perhaps you will deign to pass the evening in my company? Count upon me for every service, madame, and"—Vaquier boldly burnt his ships behind him—"what restaurant would you prefer?"

Poor little Octavia, swamped in a sea from which there seemed no issue!

"Monsieur, monsieur," stammered she, "you go too fast. I would not dare to leave the hotel."

"You will dine here, then, in my modest chamber?" demanded Vaquier, more and more pluming himself upon the alms Heaven had vouchsafed his loneliness.

A rap at the door saved Octavia a reply.

"Your friend, or maybe my husband, monsieur!" she cried, in consternation.

Before Vaquier could answer, two more imperative strokes drew him from his indecision and he opened—to a telegraph boy, presenting the blue envelope of an electric message. He ran his eye over it, then, wonderingly, read it aloud:

"What the dickens, Georges, my friend," it said, "do you mean by breaking the appointment given me to-day? I came at two promptly, found the key in the door, and, believing you only a moment absent, entered, smoked a cigar, devoured an entire volume of verse, and then, as night had come, though you had not, departed furious, and await an explanation.—Indignantly, PAILLET."

Aictavo graspn wofradr tiwh a tillte ryc.

"Monsieur, allow me. I'll return it immediately."

And she was gone, the telegram with her, leaving the dumstruck journalist staring. To await a friend three hours, then be taxed with discourtesy; to receive a lady and a tacit promise of some hours more of her agreeable society and see her suddenly disappear—it was enough to make even a journalist stare.

IV.

MEANWHILE, just above him, Octavia, proof in hand, was telling her husband everything, from the secret trip to the Rue Grosse-Pinte to the filching of the telegram. The cigar stump mystery was a mystery no longer; the painter had simply gone a floor too high and taken the merchant's room for the room of the journalist. Claude's brow shaded a little as he heard the details, but he, too, had his lesson, and he decided to be generous.

"My dear," said he, "since you wish it so much, see your people whenever you like, and it's high time, I take it, to restore the message to its rightful owner. That gentleman is the cause of our reconciliation; we'll have him up here to share our little dinner."

Which accounts for the exchange of characters that fifteen minutes later made Vaquier the guest instead of the host, and also for the absence of his contemplated dessert—from the rosy lips that smiled at him now across a steaming dish of Chateaubriand's fillets.

HONOR LUCELLE.

THERE IS SOMETHING - -
- - - of More than Ordinary Interest
in
This Week's Number of HOME NOTES.

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THE ELOPEMENT.

A WOMAN sat on a stool before the fire, shielding her face from the heat with a theatre programme, and glancing up inquiringly at a man who leant with his elbow on the mantelpiece. The latter looked as though he were dreamily considering such fantastic pictures as might have been foreshadowed by the calculations of the future, in which he appeared to be engrossed. Both were in evening dress, and a cold supper was on the table.

The room, which had the characteristic aspect of a sample show-room, obviously formed one of an ordinary suite in a large metropolitan hotel. It led directly into a bedroom beyond which was a small dressing-room. It was, as such apartments invariably are, extremely handsome and uncomfortable, recalling no domestic association to any but royal personages, who habitually exist in the frigid and candid exposure that seems to pervade the most private recesses of palaces, whether of princes or licensed for public entertainment.

The occupants of the room presented all the symptoms of having just returned from a problem play. Their faces wore an expression of such profound gloom and anxiety as could only have been induced by the hopeless entanglement of ideas in which contemporary genius delights to involve the perceptions of inferior minds.

Presently the woman took her eyes from the man's face, and, dropping her extemporised fan, stared earnestly into the fire, which was dancing such a measure as alternately left her in a black shadow, and then played brightly on her white neck and shoulders, until, on reaching her eyes, it sank back as though dismayed at the prospect of any conflict with their fierce lustre and sparkling vehemence. She was quite young, of dark, almost southern complexion, and her hair, which was of rich dusky brown, flashed here and there with changing tints of gold.

He, too, was a pleasing figure, with light curly hair and close-clipped beard, sharply-cut features, and eyes of that deep transparent blue very frequently accompanying a spiritual sensibility to nervous influences and suggesting by their liquid eloquence that their possessor through their cerulean medium can see farther into the mysteries of the invisible than those favoured with more ordinary, if equally serviceable optical provision.

The woman suddenly said without looking up:

"Have you got it?"

"Got what?"

"The thing—the pistol?"

"Yes, it's in the bag, but we shan't want it."

"Why not?"

"Because if your love for me is not great enough to make you wish to live, it is not worth the sacrifice of two lives."

"Why two?"

"You don't suppose I could live without you afterwards, do you?"

"Why not? You don't hold the same views of social life and its obligations as I do. I wish to belong to you because I love you more than life, and feel that it would be worthy any sacrifice; but I also have a conscience—however artificial you say its injunctions are—and it tells me that I may be wrong to give up all else for you, yet my sin can be compounded for, like everything else in this world, at a price. I have told you what that price is, and I think it cheap. Can you fancy me and scandal in company together, even with you to stand between us and blind me with the garlands of a lover's springtime? You know I could not bear it. What a coward you are! Why did you agree to my conditions if you had made up your mind to draw back at the last moment?"

"I don't think I am a coward, but I didn't quite understand your meaning. I thought you only wanted the revolver as a protection against *him*."

"Him! Why the pitiful scoundrel isn't worth good honest powder and lead. He's fit only to be drowned in a butt of brandy, or flogged with the stick he keeps to ill-use his wife with! Do you know that he had hit me—beaten me like a dog?"

"I'm not surprised—what for?"

"Because—I can't tell you why, but it's true."

The man shrugged his shoulders as though it didn't matter much, and then said, rather wearily, as he glanced at a small bag which lay among some rugs upon the sofa.

"Anyhow, we shan't want it. I am not such an infamous blackguard as to become a woman's lover and murderer on the same night!"

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"But I don't expect *you* to do it," she persisted; "you can go away somewhere and need never come back. You know I understand all kinds of shooting things. Why I can hit bottles twenty yards away! How could I miss my heart when it shall have grown so big with love? Come, Harold!" she added, going close up to him and laying her hand on his shoulder, "you're not going to play me false, are you? You swore that if what I wished could be done by human hands, you would do it. Has your love been all a pretence, incapable of any sacrifice? Can't you realise that I love you much more than I value life, and that, as death must come some day, I wish to die to-morrow with your kisses warm upon my lips. Come! Be my lover now and forget to-morrow!"

She twined her arms about him, and kissed his mouth and neck with passionate tenderness. Like a man in a dream he held her to his breast, closer and closer.

She broke from him with a low, soft laugh of triumph and taking a bottle of champagne from the table, knocked off its head with a knife and poured out two foaming glasses. She gave one to her companion, who seemed too dazed to move, and then, holding up the other, cried:

"Come! let us drink to the union of life's two unconquerable forces, love and death! Good luck to them both!"

When they had drained their glasses, she flung hers down upon the tiled hearth, where it broke into a hundred fragments; his dropped from his hand on the carpet and remained unbroken.

The woman went quickly towards the adjoining room, the man stood for a moment or two motionless, then he started, and, going quietly to the little bag, drew out a revolver and slipped it into the pocket of his overcoat, which, with his hat, he next put on; also adjusting a silk scarf round his neck with a nice precision as to the arrangement of its folds. He picked up the programme from the floor and wrote upon it in pencil: "I find I can't do it after all. Good-bye. Don't bother, I'll make it all right downstairs. Send my things to club to-morrow and then go home."

He stuck the paper in the glass over the fireplace, and, snatching a long, black glove from the table, noiselessly left the room.

It was barely 11.30 o'clock, and as the office of the hotel was still open he stopped and paid his bill, telling the clerk to include the cost of a broken wine-glass and next morning's breakfast, for which he ordered a devilled sole. Then he lit a cigar and sauntered across Trafalgar Square.

He went into a club in Pall Mall, of which he was a member, and sat moodily in the smoking-room. Even men who knew him well, after looking in his face, passed him without a word; there was that in his eyes which froze the commonplace greetings on their lips, and which long afterwards they recalled and talked of.

At about three o'clock he went out again, and walked slowly and thoughtfully in a northerly direction. The streets were now quiet and deserted, and as he passed by, several policemen eyed him queerly, and one asked him, respectfully, whether he was all right. He nodded and went on.

Though it was still dark there were signs in the east of the approaching dawn as he emerged on the suburban heath to which he had been steadily advancing. He went straight to the trunk of a tree which lay where it had fallen in a great storm. For many years it had formed a seat beneath a noble elm, standing on the crown of a little grassy knoll that sloped down to one of the bye-roads of the common. In summertime it was a favourite retreat for simple lovers, and many hearts had beat faster and many lips had sealed their vows of truth from the encouragement of its grave repose.

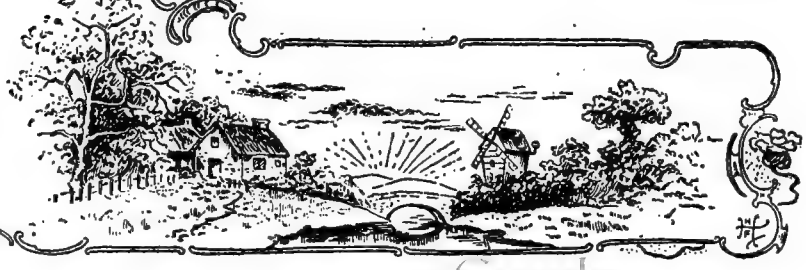
Here he sat down and lit another cigar, the last, in his case. As he finished it the sun was just beginning to glimmer on the horizon; the grey twilight grew paler and more transparent, until the stars swung themselves into other hemispheres, and little birds, roosting over his head, fluttered their stiffened feathers and chirruped a sleepy welcome to their ascending providence.

He took the long, black glove from his pocket and examined it curiously. He tried to pull it on to his hand, but found it would only admit three fingers. It was the left, and on it he could trace the mark of a wedding ring. He kissed it in a sudden frenzy of passion, and, as he did so, caught the faint aroma of the delicate arm that had so lately worn it. For an instant the rush of emotion to his external senses completely unmanned him, as he covered his face in his hands, and his whole frame shook in an agonising endeavour to control himself.

He was soon quite calm again, and, after kissing the glove once more, he carefully hid it under the roots of the tree behind him. Then he sat down again and shot himself through the heart.

WILLARD HOLCOMB.

A good chance is offered on page 279 of securing a money prize if you have a few moments to spare.



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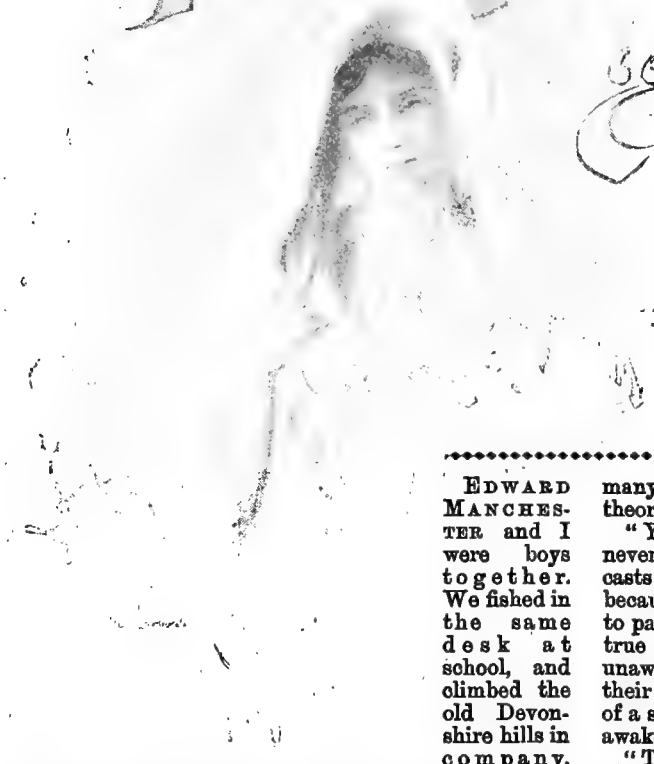
THE MORTAL "TACWIN"



[The Mohammedan religion teaches that there is a race of demi-spirits, winged females of beautiful forms, who watch over and defend mortals from all harm. These marvellous beings are called "Tacwins," or Fates, and one is assigned to guide, counsel, comfort and direct every human being.]

EDWARD MANCHESTER and I were boys together. We fished in the same desk at school, and climbed the old Devonshire hills in company. The current of our youthful lives ran in the same channel, until when, standing at the portals of early manhood, our paths widely diverged. Following the guidance of his ambition, he became a printer's apprentice, drifted into editorial work, and finally went to Glasgow. It was then that I lost all trace of him. I entered a commercial groove and became an agent for a firm of engine builders.

So it happened that after fifteen years' separation we met again at Cape Town whither I had been ordered on duty. Of course our boyhood's friendship was renewed. He was now the editor and publisher of a prosperous journal, and the same hale and hearty good fellow of my early association. To his hospitable home I was invited, and it was the happiest, cheeriest fireside at which I was ever privileged to sit.

His wife, who was at least ten years his junior, was a woman of rare mental qualifications, and her assistance to him in his profession, and likeness of spirit, had brought the pair into a perfect harmony which was most pleasing to observe. Sitting in his library one evening, our conversation turned upon the subject of dreams. I doubted whether they were in any degree prophetic, and maintained with ardour the opinion that dreams were simply due to a disordered nervous system, citing many learned psychologists in support of my theory.

"You may not believe me," said my friend, "but, nevertheless, I know that dreams are sometimes forecasts of things to occur. I say I know this to be true, because the most important event of my life was brought to pass through the influence of a dream. It is perhaps true that coarse natures do not 'entertain angels unawares' when sleep hovers over them and enchains their senses, but there are fine organisations possessed of a sixth sense, and that extraordinary attribute is only awakened when all the others are in repose."

"That is a novel idea," I replied, "and I do not care to accept it as true without definite and convincing proof. However, what was your dream? After I have heard it related and am informed what came of it, perhaps I may become a convert to your new philosophy."

Knocking the ashes from his cigar and settling himself comfortably in his easy-chair, my friend proceeded to relate the following extraordinary incident:

"Some years ago I was employed on the reporting staff of a Yorkshire newspaper. It was uphill work, and my salary was not munificent. In fact, there were frequently times when the ends utterly and positively refused to meet. One night I repaired to my room a good deal out of humour with myself and the world. Like most other newspaper men, I had grown cynical, so plainly were the shams and deceits of humanity held up to my view in the course of my daily tasks. It was in November, and a chill wind blew. I stirred the fire, and sat down to commune with myself. The blaze dispersed a radiant heat; a sense of warmth and comfort stole over my heart and brain, and after a little I fell fast asleep. I say fast asleep, and yet I hardly believe that was my actual condition, for in all my slumber it seemed to me that I was possessed of every faculty.

"I was transported to Arabia. The sun was sinking behind a typical Eastern city, and its fading glories

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"Whither dost thou go, mortal?" she inquired.

lighted up the domes and minarets of many an imposing mosque. I was in trouble as to the course I should pursue. The people were all strange and forbidding in appearance, and uttered not a word as they strode on, with staves in their hands, towards the city, while, in the opposite direction to that in which my course seemed to lie, reposed the apparently unending, drifted sands of the desert. From the city a perfume as of sweet spices was wafted, while from the desert a hot and withering blast assailed me with its scorching breath.

"Suddenly a woman stood beside me. I could not tell from what quarter she had approached. She was clad in the garb of an Arabian maiden, her face artfully concealed beneath a turban, from which depended a heavy veil. She spoke to me—I have never heard but one other voice so sweet and musical—and addressed me in my native tongue.

"'Whither dost thou go, mortal?' she inquired.

"'In truth I do not know,' was my response. 'Duty seems to demand that I should cross the desert waste before me, but my way is not plain, neither do I believe I shall survive the trials and fatigue of the journey.s Inclination impels me towards the city, where all i repose, and where the most luscious fruit tempts my eyes, and the perfume of rare exotics is grateful to my senses.'

"'Touch them not. The fruit is the apple of Sodom, and is as ashes upon the tongue. The odours which seem so delicious and entrancing are deadly poisons; whoever breathes them is condemned to for ever wear a heart of stone. Follow me, and I will lead you to a haven of safety, for has not Allah intrusted you to my care? Doubt not my sincerity, for if you do so you will fall and faint by the way.'

"'And who are you, good lady? How can you resist the deadly perils of the trackless desert? If I trust you, what assurance have I that you will not lead me forth to die and be for ever lost in the shifting sands?'

"'Ask your own heart and be mindful of its dictates. I cannot deceive you if I would, for Allah has created me to keep watch and guard over you.'

"I was convinced that the maiden spoke truly. Turning to my veiled companion, after one last glance towards the city, I said:

"'Lead on. I will follow you without reserve. I put my trust in you, though the way appears difficult, and the end is as closely veiled in obscurity and doubt as are your features hidden from my sight.'

"She turned and walked fleetly across the desert, and soon the blissful city was lost from view below the horizon, and all around us lay the silent, merciless sands. Day after day, night after night we plodded on. Sometimes an awful sense of weariness oppressed me; my feet sank to the ankles in the remorseless, yielding sands; the intense heat shrivelled my skin and parched my lips. But my companion was never weary and paused not. If I turned laggard, she prompted me to greater exertion with the words:

"'Even the desert has an end. Yonder lies your way. The troubles you now endure are but blessings in disguise. At the end there is eternal peace and a laurel wreath for your brow. Would you fail now, after you have suffered so much?'

"At each sound of her voice my faith was renewed as if by magic, and my strength came back to me. It seemed to me that months had been consumed in our journey when at last we attained the banks of a limpid stream. Beyond it was a stretch of palms and cedars, intermingled with luxurious plants and the most exquisite of flowers.

"'You have attained the reward of your sufferings,' said my guide. 'Here at last is rest and peace. All your journeyings are at an end and now comes your reward. Henceforth you will never know a want, but pass your remaining days on earth in doing good to your fellows. Our paths lie a little apart from this time, but I will watch over you. A sense of my presence will always be vouchsafed to you, and in paradise we shall be reunited.'

"'But,' I implored, 'why must you leave me? You have been my good angel, my guide, my saviour in all the trials which have beset my path. Remain ever at my side, for I may fail yet without your aid.'

"'I would that it might be so; but I fear it cannot. Be patient. In another state of existence we cannot be parted.'

"'Then let me see your face once before we part. Your voice has sustained me—to look upon your features would be far greater bliss.'

"'Know you not that the face of an Arab maiden is ever veiled? Even so it is with the angels when in human company. If you should but look into my eyes I should become human like yourself; then our companionship could never end.'

"'And that is my chief desire,' was my response, and

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seizing her veil I tore it from her face. It was not a countenance of rare beauty, as the world ordinarily judges the blandishments of women, but it was pure, and sweet, and true. It touched my heart as never had woman's face appealed to it before. The great, soulful eyes looked steadfastly into my own.

"'You have found me after years of vain searching, and released me from my bondage. Henceforth I am with you to the end of my life. For you was I created, and faithful to you will I remain until death, and even the grave shall not hide us from each other.'

"I awoke. The fire had died away to embers, and the room was growing cold. Long I marvelled what such a dream could portend. Weeks rolled by and the face of the Arabian maiden was ever before me. The months passed into years, and still every lineament of those angelic features, and the expression of the deep, soulful eyes remained implanted in my memory. Half unconsciously I scanned the faces of thousands in the busy streets, but among all the hurrying throng that face was never encountered. Still I was impressed that one day I should find it. I persevered in my profession, and, when downcast by adverse fortunes, that silent face strengthened me, as it had in my dream of the journey across the desert."

I had become intensely interested, for my friend was an excellent story-teller. At this point he paused. "Well," said I inquiringly, "what came of it?"

"Two years ago," he continued, "I came again to Cape Town. One day, shortly after my arrival, I was standing at a street corner, waiting for a tram, and in the meantime turned and carelessly glanced at a case of photographs displayed at the foot of a flight of stairs leading to an artist's studio. I gave a start as my gaze rested upon one face. The deep, dark eyes looking into mine; the regular features, the very folds of the hair, caught up gracefully over the high, intellectual forehead, were those of the maiden of my dream.

"I lost all interest in the tram, and hastened up the stairway to the studio. The photographer evidently considered me an escaped lunatic.

"'You have a picture in your case below—whose is it?' I inquired nervously.

"'A picture. Why, there are two hundred. How should I know which one you mean?'

"'Very true, I did not think of that. But, pardon me, sir, one of those photographs reminds me most forcibly of an absent friend whom I greatly desire to find. Will you be kind enough to lend me your aid in the matter?'

"'Certainly sir. Your manner, when you first came in, led me to doubt your sanity. However, I am now reassured, and shall be most happy to serve you.' His kindness availed little. The photographer could not tell to whom the picture belonged. He concluded that it must be the order of a transient visitor to the city, the negative had been destroyed, and so I departed in a more disturbed condition of mind than before. I had intended to pursue my profession in South Africa as close attention to work had produced a pulmonary complaint, from which in this mild climate I hoped to obtain relief, but all my energies were now directed towards finding the original of the haunting, evasive

"Pardon me, but we have met before."

photograph. I secured an engagement upon the staff of a daily newspaper. Wherever I went—in church, theatre, or through the streets—my whole soul was absorbed in searching for what a majority of persons would call an illusion.

"In the fulfilment of my duties I was sent to Pretoria, to the house of a wealthy mine-owner for the purpose of an interview. This gentleman kindly invited me to remain the night in his house. During the evening several friends strolled in and among them was a young woman, who, in some mysterious way, did not impress me as a stranger. As she turned her face towards mine, our eyes met.

"I started back in astonishment. I had met the lady of my dream.

"'Pardon me, but we have met before, I believe,' I said, half apologetically, as soon as I could collect my scattered senses.

"'I do not know, sir, there is certainly a familiar tone in your voice.' She spoke in the same sweet and bewitching tones so deeply fixed in my memory. In my confusion, I quickly added:

"'It must have been in Arabia.'

"The eyebrows were arched in surprise. 'I think not, sir—I have never travelled in the East.'

"Well, to cut my story short, a lasting friendship was formed then and there. You have met Mrs. Manchester. She has proved all that my dream foretold. It is true that she has no recollection of having been my companion in the desert sands of Arabia, but I am none the less convinced that she is the 'Taowin' from whose lovely face I snatched the veil."

Grace Hawden.

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CHICHI.

CHICHI was unhappy—a most unprecedented thing, for Chichi ordinarily was but a synonym for sunshine. Her red lips drooped mournfully, and two great tears fell from the velvet depths of her dark eyes, as she swayed gently to and fro in her hammock, swung beneath the pepper trees.

What cared she that the Mexican sky, blue and cloudless, stretched over her like a benediction? What cared she that the hot sun, glinting between the feathery branches, fell on her uncovered head, bringing out the golden strands of her dark hair? That the birds called to her merrily? That down in the city all was gay with flags, and it was the first day of La Fiesta? Others might go to join the festivities and view the procession; but she? No! For the first time in her short, happy life Chichi was tasting the bitter cup of sorrow. And why? Any one of her companions could have told you. All because of the "White Señorita."

She was beautiful as an angel that Chichi admitted—in her white gown, her hair shining like gold, and her eyes blue as the sky. But could she dance the fandango, or throw the golden ball with that inimitable grace which never failed to win for Chichi enthusiastic bravas? Haughty and dignified as a queen was the "White Señorita." But could she stand as steadily as Chichi in the little car drawn by the milk-white horses, and smile coquettishly as the people deluged her with the carnival roses?

Yet they had made her queen of the *fiesta*, and Chichi, who had held that honour for four years, had gracefully yielded, for the "White Señorita" was a stranger among them, and a guest, and it was but courteous that this favour should be shown her. This was not the cause of her trouble; it was that José should forsake her—José, who had sung under her window in the soft moonlit nights; José, who had lain at her feet, through the hot Mexican noons, when even the birds were silent and the only sound was the rustling of the palm leaves, as some faint breeze stirred them to reluctant life, whispering to her willing ears his ardent words of love. That José, who had proclaimed her as his *inamorata* before them all at the last bull-fight, should forget her, and bow before the cold beauty of the "White Señorita."

She would let him go, the false one! There were plenty of *cavalleros* who would be glad of her favour. To-night would be the masked ball. She would not stay at home and weep; she would go and dance, the gayest of the gay. José should repent his perfidy—there were many who would die for her if need be. Someone should avenge her wrongs, and the "White Señorita," the stranger who had usurped her rights, should see whether it could be done with impunity! Her eyes blazed, and she smiled half savagely, then her pretty head drooped thoughtfully. She was plotting her revenge.

Down in the city, where all was gay, time flew on silver wings. To Maud Fairchild, the young English girl who had come to this summer land that her fast failing health might be benefited, all seemed like a dream. To the eyes of the dark-skinned Mexicans her fair loveliness seemed doubly beautiful, and from the first day of her arrival she had been called the "White Señorita."

They looked upon her with an admiration which was almost awe. When they had offered to make her queen of their festival she accepted the honour, as it was intended she should, as the highest compliment they could pay, and was enjoying the novel situation with a zest which brought the soft colour to her usually pale cheeks.

To José, who kept closely by her side, she looked like an angel, and yet in spite of the fact that she smiled half doubtfully in answer to his burning glances and impassioned words, which she only half understood, he was not as supremely happy as the occasion seemed to warrant.

He welcomed the evening which came at last, for it closed the festivities with a dance, at which the reproachful faces would be hidden behind masks, and his movements undetected. But instead of relief this brought him only a new reason for discomfort. Another *cavallero* kept persistently by his lady's side, and seemed determined to engross her attention.

Not a movement of the graceful figure did he lose, but watched him gloomily, until a familiar gesture or two suggested a solution of the mystery which closer observation confirmed. It was Gue, the brother of Chichi, who was seeking a quarrel in order to avenge this discourtesy shown his sister. José ground his teeth furiously. Should he be outwitted by a mere boy? Chafing under the various discomforts of the day, augmented by this last insult, he determined to show them that José de Ayala was not to be trifled with.

He stepped forward to where the couple were standing at one side of the room engaged in earnest conversation.

"If the señorita will permit me," he said, "I would remind her that she has chosen me for her *cavallero*."

The lady looked up a little bewildered, while her attendant drew her hand more closely within his arm and laughed scornfully.

"One does not need to keep a promise made to one so false as Don José," he answered. José's face grew livid behind his mask.

"Señor," he said huskily, "as a gentleman of Mexico, I demand satisfaction."

The other laughed again. "Take it," he answered, and stepping back a little, he struck him lightly on the face.

The next instant the dagger of José was buried in the heart of his assailant, who had not touched his own jewelled weapon, and who fell forward without a word.

Alarmed by the cries of Miss Fairchild, the merry-makers hurried to the spot, and in their gay dresses pressed around José, who had torn his mask from his face, and, kneeling on the ground, was supporting the lifeless figure of the young man, whose mask had also fallen. As the "White Señorita" knelt beside him, trying with frantic hands to staunch his life's blood he opened his eyes, and heedless of the crowd around or the little white hands that were pressed against his heart, he looked up into the eyes of José.

"It would have been kinder, *querido*," he said, smiling faintly, "had you done it first. *Adios!*"

José did not answer. Horrified and despairing, he was looking down into the white face, not of Gue, but—Chichi!

BEATRICE DE LUNA.

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HIGH PLAY.

A COMEDY OFF THE STAGE.

By George Manville Fenn.

SUMMARY.

The story opens with an interview between Lady Braetoun and her son Roderick, in which she endeavours to induce him to give up "Baby" Lee, a chorus girl, and marry Olive, Isaac Emsworth's heiress. Emsworth takes Olive to consult Dr. Murray, who advises a voyage to South Africa in the *Greyberg*, in which he also is going. Roderick, who is friendly with Murray, comes for advice on the terribly bad condition of his health, and the Doctor recommends a trip in the same boat. "Baby" Lee, on being discarded, seeks means of revenging herself on Olive. Roderick, after his marriage, enters into an agreement with one Daines to pay ten thousand pounds if the latter will marry "Baby" Lee.

CHAPTER XII.

Dr. Murray's Suspicions.

As Murray entered Braetoun's box unheard by its occupant, his first glance was opposite to where Lucy was seated with her glass fixed upon Olive, evidently watching her every movement.

As Murray halted for a few moments in the doorway, he saw Lucy turn her head, as if to speak to someone nearly hidden behind her, and with whom she appeared to be carrying on an eager conversation, but only to turn and use her glass again upon Olive.

"The scoundrel," thought Murray. "How can a man act like that?"

Then all thought of Braetoun passed away, for Olive turned, saw him, held out her hand, and pointed to the chair by her side.

"I am so glad to see you," she cried. "I never thought that you could care for such frivolous amusements."

"I do not," he said; "but I came. Do you?"

"Oh yes, I like to see this once. Roderick wanted me to come. It is so bright and pretty, but I should not care to come often. I like the music though; it seems so merry and sparkling. Did you meet Roderick?"

"No."

"I almost wonder you did not. He said he would see you, and that he was going to have a cigarette."

Murray's brow clouded over a little. He was not surprised that he had not seen Braetoun, and he glanced involuntarily across the theatre again, to see that Lucy was talking with animation to someone invisible saving his white gloves and shirt front, for he kept well behind the curtain and the lady's chair.

"How pretty a theatre looks all lit up like this," continued Olive. "I wish my father had come; I tried so hard to persuade him."

"I can hardly realise his coming to such a place," said Murray, with a grave smile.

"But yet you came," she replied merrily. "I think it's quite right though. My father works far too hard, and I'm sure you do, Doctor. Always dealing with people's troubles. Oh, it's quite right for you to take a little amusement."

"But is this amusement?" he said drily.

"Oh, I suppose so. The people here seem to think it is."

"Then, you really do not think so?" he said earnestly.

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"I've been laughing a great deal," she replied, "but I do begin to feel a little ashamed of it, and I don't think I shall come very often—unless Roderick wants me to. Do stop till he comes back, and I want you to look at him. It's our secret, mind: I shouldn't like him to think I said such a thing to you, but I am a little uneasy about him. He has been so unwell. I want you to notice how he is, and if you don't think he is as well as he should be, to make him come and see you."

"I will," said Murray, whose eyes were fixed upon Lucy.

"Ah, you are looking at that lady in the box opposite. She is so pretty, Doctor Murray; I looked at her through the glass. She is charming. Quite girl-like, and exquisitely dressed, but she is so rude. She has been staring at my diamonds all the evening."

"At your diamonds," said Murray thoughtfully; "but perhaps she thought you were rude for looking at her."

"Oh, that's cruel. I haven't been, indeed. I only just peeped at her twice, but she has been regularly watching me."

"Envious perhaps. Some ladies worship diamonds."

The dimly seen figure behind the chair.

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"I don't. They fidget me. They are presents, and I am always so glad to have them off, so as to be sure that I have not lost any."

"Braetonn is coming back," said Murray. "The curtain will be up directly."

"Of course; he can't be long."

But though the conductor was back in his place, and watching for a hint from the prompter, there was no movement made in the opposite box, and as Murray furtively glanced there from time to time, he only made out that one of the white gloves was resting on the lady's chair.

"I asked Roderick if he knew who the lady opposite was, and he said he thought she was an actress, but she does not look like one—at least, I should not think she does."

"Jealous," thought Murray, without heeding the remark, for he was watching Lucy. "Could she have known that Braetoun had taken this box? Easily, I suppose. He ought to have taken his wife away at once. To go there is unpardonable. Poor girl!"

He was gazing hard now at the dimly seen figure behind the chair opposite to her when the drop scene began to rise for the second act, and he started from his seat and stared aghast at Braetoun, who had come silently into the box.

"No, no; sit down, old man, plenty of room. I'll take this chair behind little wifey," said Braetoun, as Murray vacated the place he had occupied.

"Yes, yes, do pray stay, Doctor," cried Olive eagerly, and her eyes seconded the words of her prayer.

"Want to talk to you after the next act. Will you sit down, or am I to make you? Hush! Silence! the people are looking."

Braetoun followed up his order with a push, and Murray subsided into his seat, after giving his old school-fellow a merry threatening look.

For he felt as if a great load had been taken off his breast, and there was a secret desire to reach back his right hand, grip Braetoun's hand and press it warmly by way of penance for the cruel, disloyal thoughts to which he had given way. For there was the dimly seen figure still behind Lucy Lee's chair, and she was turning her head to speak to whoever it was again.

It was to Murray as if a dark cloud had passed away from the front of the house, his breast was lightened, and in a few minutes he was laughing with his companions at the nonsense dressed up for their benefit, and seemed happier than he had felt for weeks. For there was something more than enjoyable in sitting there, turning from time to time to talk to the bright, happy woman at his side, whose girlish, innocent ways were so fresh and *naïve*, and who seemed happiest when those with her found most pleasure in the scene.

"Roddie," she whispered at last, "did you ever see anything so rude before? Do look at that lady opposite—but she can't be a lady, or she would not stare at me so."

"Silly little bird!" said Braetoun playfully from where he sat, well behind the curtain, and Murray listened intently. "Looking at you! Pooh! Nonsense! She's watching the noble-looking doctor. A little *éprise*. I say, Olive, isn't it shocking? You and I come here on the sly in reckless dissipation, and here we find the solemn, fashionable physician taking his relaxation too, and being ogled by one of the prettiest women in the house. You wouldn't have thought it of him, now, would you?"

"I shouldn't have thought it of him," said Olive, smiling ingenuously at their companion, "and I don't think it of him. I know better. She was watching me long before you came, Doctor Murray."

Murray smiled his thanks, and as soon as the drop scene fell he went back to his place, Braetoun at a look following him out.

Murray was half disposed to allude to Lucy's presence, and merely to suggest that his friend should take care and be well on his guard against any rencontre with the jealous-looking little body opposite; but he felt that he had already, in his solicitude for Olive's peace of mind, so gravely misjudged his friend that he merely shook hands and said:

"You don't look quite up to the mark, Roderick, my son. Give me a look in soon."

Five minutes later he was in his place again listening to the murmur of conversation in the box over his head, and now for the first time he noticed that Cyrus Daines had not returned to his place.

"Ha!" he muttered, "how prone one is to misjudge people. It must be he all the time. Poor Braetoun! How happy she seems."

He was looking up at Olive as he said these words, and saw that she was leaning back with her head half turned so as to gaze back at her husband, who had not changed his seat.

Caught up the bottle . . . and handed it to her.

"How beautiful she is," thought Murray as he gazed at the curve of the white throat and neck and the snowy bosom upon which the diamonds were sparkling, and then he started and frowned, for a low, angry little laugh came from the box overhead, and he knew in his heart that it was in derision of the picture visible in the opposite box.

CHAPTER XIII.

What a Spiteful Woman Will.

Allan Murray was quite correct in his surmise: the derisive spiteful laugh was directed at the little domestic scene taking place in the box opposite, and Lucy raised her opera glass, and looked on till Braetoun writhed in his impotent anger, and but for the fact that he was seated behind his wife, he would have been unable to hide his scowling countenance from her. As it was, she felt startled by the imperious way in which he told her to look at the stage, and the progress of the third act.

"I'll get her away early," he muttered, but he altered his mind directly, for he felt certain that as soon as Lucy saw them prepare to leave the box she would leave hers, and wait to encounter them, and perhaps make a scene.

"Why doesn't that little cad do something to stop her?" he muttered. "He's in the box with her still. I believe he's fighting with her instead of against."

He was quite right. Cyrus Daines was in the box which, out of compliment the lessee had sent to the little favourite who had so often brought good fortune to his house, and Lucy had gloried in the chance of confronting the man who had forsaken her, and having a long look at his wife. It was the opportunity for which she had been waiting, and she had worked herself up into a fit of desperation before she started for the theatre, and somehow the excitement she felt had lent a peculiar charm to her *petite* beauty, with the result that those who knew her well by sight declared that she had never looked so attractive before.

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"Why, it's some acid—vitriol!"

Cyrus Daines had shared the opinion of the admirers, and with an unwonted feeling of excitement he sat through the first act, and then made his way to her box, but found the door closed, and as there was no answer to his light tap he waited till the box-keeper came round, and told him to open the door.

"Beg pardon, sir; Miss Lee said she would not see any visitors to-night," said the man.

"Exactly," said Daines, as he slipped something into the man's hand, "but she will see me."

Daines's face was familiar to the box-keeper as a friend of Lord Braetoun, and without making any further opposition, he unclosed the door, and Daines slipped in at once and closed it after him.

She turned sharply:

"Who's that? I said I would not see anyone."

There was an autocratic sound in her words, but she had reigned queen in that house for a whole year.

"It is only I, Lucy," he said softly.

"Yes, it is always only you," she cried pettishly. "Why have you come?"

"Because I wanted to be near you and talk to you."

"Then I don't want you, so please to go."

"I can't go, dear; pray let me stay," he whispered.

"Mr. Daines, if you ever dare to speak to me again like that, it is the last time you will ever have the opportunity of saying a word, here or anywhere else."

"I apologise humbly," he whispered. "It was only because I loved you. The word slipped out."

"Then please don't love me. There isn't such a thing as love—nothing but hatred."

"And malice," said Daines to himself.

"Look at that—look at your dear friend and that silly chit of a girl he calls his wife. Wait till she finds him out. Sitting there, turning to make eyes at him every moment, and before me. Oh, it's sickening!"

Daines was silent, feeling that it was the best policy if he wished to stay; and he stood behind her chair, waiting for her to speak again; but for a long space she was silent, spending her time in using her glass constantly to watch the opposite box, but rarely glancing at the stage.

"She'll begin talking after a time," thought Daines, and he stood watching Braetoun from the obscurity of the box, and thinking how he had better proceed so as to prevent there being a scene.

For from Lucy's manner he felt pretty well convinced that if the two parties met there would be an outburst of some kind; but he was not prepared to find so volcanic a nature as he was discovering in the little fragile-looking girl with her sweet innocent-looking features.

Daines was right; she leant back at last to talk to him, glad of the opportunity to speak out to one who knew all her trouble, and from that moment she began to show how she had been worked up to the present pitch, and how she was striving to keep her anger at white heat.

"Oh, it is unbearable," she said at last, in an angry whisper. "Is he parading that woman here on purpose to insult me?"

"Surely not. Braetoun would not be guilty of such an act of cruelty."

Lucy turned herself half round and looked at him mockingly.

"Roderick's friend speaking?" she said.

"No, I am not his friend. I consider that he has behaved too ill to you to be a friend of mine."

"How nice," she said, with a little laugh. "What a child you must think me, Mr. Daines."

"I was neither flattering nor trying to deceive you, Lucy," he said softly.

"No, you never did," she said with a flippant laugh.

"Yes, I have, often. Talked nonsense by the yard, but it was before I knew you for what you are."

"No, nor that tack won't do," she said shortly. "I'm sharp enough to read you, Mr. Cyrus Daines."

"No," he said quietly; "not yet, but you will understand me some day, I hope."

"Perhaps. I am at school yet, learning what men are."

"We are a bad lot, I'm afraid."

"Very," said Lucy drily. "Don't try to cheat me with any more of that kind of talk, Mr. Daines, because it is insulting me."

"God knows I would not insult you, Lucy," he said earnestly. "That's not like the little girl whom Braetoun introduced me to."

"And that's not like the sharp-tongued, chaffing Mr. Daines he introduced me to."

"Circumstances have altered me," he said.

"And so they have me," she said vindictively. "What woman could bear to see her sitting there like that, in her diamonds and dainty dress? Oh, I could kill her!"

"No, you could not."

"What! I could, without mercy, as I would any other thing that turned and stung me to get me out of her way."

"Be just to her," said Daines. "She is innocent and good enough."

"There you go," she cried, in a fierce whisper, and she flashed her eyes upon him. "Innocent and good enough—throw that in my teeth—I tried to be innocent and good

to him. Why can't I be innocent and good? His wife—oh, it makes me mad!"

"I know you were innocent and good enough to him," whispered Daines, "and how good and loving you can be."

"Sitting there mocking me with his wife—his wife!"

"Well, why cannot you come here as someone's wife? Young, clever, beautiful."

"Ha! ha! Go on: flatter away. Who'd marry me?"

"I would; on my soul, I would," he whispered, as he sank in the chair behind her, and the house burst into a roar of laughter, succeeded by a thunder of applause—plaudits continued till the conductor lowered his *bâton*, and the leading lady came back to the front, to repeat the song and dance which had given so much satisfaction.

"You would?" she said softly, and she turned slowly round and looked him full in the eyes.

"Yes, to-morrow, as soon as the marriage could take place," he whispered passionately, "for I love you, Lucy, with all my heart."

"I shall end by believing that you are in earnest, Mr. Daines," she said lightly.

"You believe me now?" he continued.

"Isn't it a strange place to talk to me like that?"

"What is the place to me?" he said. "You are here, so close to me that I could touch you—if I dared."

"And you daren't," she said mockingly.

"I dare not. A few months ago I dared, and, but for a feeling that it wouldn't be square to Braetoun, I could have caught you in my arms and kissed you, because I did not love you. But now that I have found what a true, good little woman you are, I dare not do more than take your hand and kiss your fingers as respectfully as I would those of any lady in the land."

She uttered a little sigh, and her hand, as she sat half turned to him, was slowly pressed into his, and he bent down and softly held it to his lips.

"Thank you, Mr. Daines," she said, as she withdrew it. "I think I do believe, but it can never be. I'm not the girl I was, and you can't understand. I suppose I'm very wicked, but I never thought I was. I only feel one thing now, and that is, that I am Roderick Braetoun's wife, in spite of that woman sitting by him in her diamonds. He is my husband, and I can never even think of anyone again, wicked as I am. No, I'm not the girl you fancy, for he has worked up everything that was bad and evil in me, till he has made me what I feel I am to-night, ready to kill her, ready to do anything to wring his heart with agony, as he has wrung mine—I hate them."

"You will not do that; you will forgive him. You have nothing to forgive in her," whispered Daines, as she turned away from him now, and sat watching the opposite box.

"Never. Look at him with his friend there. A coward. He has kept him there so as to have an excuse for sneaking behind his wife. I saw through the whole manœuvre when the other wanted to go. I hate him, too. He sent Rod abroad for his health. Tore him away from me, and was the beginning of all this trouble. If it hadn't been for him Rod would never have seen that wretched girl, and thrown me over. Look at Rod now; I'm making him shrink so that he hardly dare stay in the house. There, you had better go and leave me; I'm not fit to have anyone near me now."

"Hush, hush! Be calm."

"Calm! with him sitting before me like that! Why, I feel as if I could get up and shout at them both; but if I did, the fools in the house who knew me would say I was acting again, and laugh. Ha, ha, ha! what a burlesque life is, Mr. Daines, isn't it?"

With the feeling growing stronger upon him that he must stay if he wished to prevent his companion from performing some mad act, Daines resisted all her efforts to get rid of him, and by degrees, towards the end of the piece, she seemed to grow calmer, saying no more about the occupants of the box opposite, but talking to him of the piece, and the various actresses whom she knew, praising and blaming their performance with a critical ability that pleased him more and more. But nearly all the time he noted that she kept on watching the box.

"There," she said at last; "it's nearly over, and I shall be glad to get back to auntie, and go to bed and forget all about it."

"That's wise," he said earnestly.

"Very well, then as you see I've grown wise," she said coldly, "please to say good-night and go."

"Let me see you home."

"No, thank you; it's only a couple of hundred yards, and I'll go by myself."

"I may come and see you to-morrow?"

"No. Please to go, Mr. Daines—if you have all the respect for me that you have tried to make me believe, you will do as I ask you and go at once."

"Yes," he said gravely, "you are right. I will go. Good-night."

He held out his gloved hand and she held out hers with a quick jerk, and a large square cut-glass bottle fell on the floor heavily.

"What's that?" he said sharply.

"Scent—scent," she cried. "The bottle. He gave it to me," she whispered excitedly. "Don't touch it. Is the stopper out?"

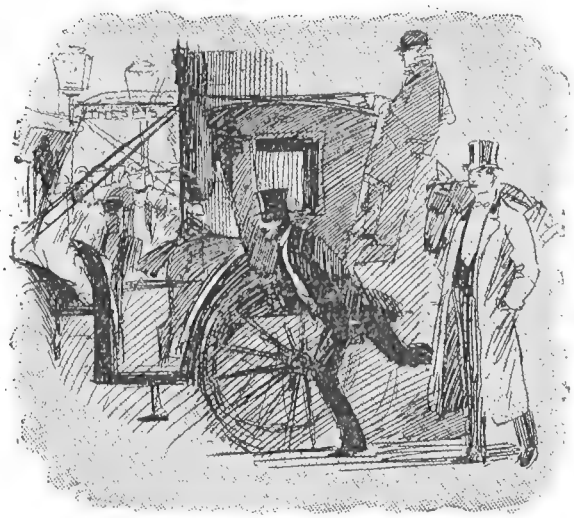
Her words were too late, for Daines had caught up the bottle, pressed the stopper back, and handed it to her.

"Very little spilt," he said.

"Oh," she said, with a stifled sob. "Quick! Go now. Good-night. No, don't shake hands."

He stood for a few moments, thinking how strange she was as she turned her back and sat gazing across the house. Then, with a sigh, he took his light overcoat and crush hat from a chair, and passed out, closing the door after him, while the music of the concluding scene of the burlesque suggested that the piece was nearly over.

"Yes," he said to himself, "I would marry her to-morrow if she would say 'Yes.' Poor little lassie! How much there is in her that is good and true! That was not her to-night.



Round to the main entrance.

The sight of him with his wife maddened her, but she has grown calmer now."

He went down to the thickly draped doorway leading into the stalls, and stood thoughtfully gazing at the finale of the piece. Braetoun and his wife were still in their box, standing. Murray had left them just before the curtain began to fall amidst a storm of plaudits.

He forced his way to her side.

"Author! Author!" rang out, amidst a tremendous burst of plaudits, and that gentleman in black came forward to make his bow, just as someone behind pressed Daines' arm.

"Let me pass," said a familiar voice; "I have left my overcoat in the stall."

"One moment," said Daines, "or Jerdyne will be off. Let's give him a help. By Jove, how my hands smart!"

He thrust the Gibus under his arm, and raised his hands to clap.

"What's the matter with your gloves?" said Murray in a sharp whisper.

"Eh, matter?—why, they're all black!"

"Black! They're burning, man! What have you been doing? Where have you been? Why, it's some acid—vitriol!"

Daines turned upon him with a look of horror on his ghastly face, as the people were crowding out into the lobby, then turned and tried to rush upstairs, with a strange singing in his ears.

Lucy's words of hate—her rage against those who had been seated before her—the bottle she had dropped, and which he had raised to replace the stopper—scent? There was no odour.

"And I left her half mad like that! She cheated me! Great heavens, if they meet! What is she going to do?"

As he strove to get up into the vestibule the answer came in a vision of horror, in which he saw Olive, Lady Braetoun, the bright, girlish young wife, in her diamonds, leaning proudly on her husband's arm, and Lucy, his cast-off mistress, waiting somewhere for him in the crowd at the top of the stairs—that crowd so rapidly increasing that he could hardly stir—and, half hysterical with horror, he felt as if he could shriek aloud.

"Steady, sir, please. It is of no use to crowd," said a gentleman sternly, as Daines strove to force his way along. "Ladies, sir, ladies! Stop: you shall not pass like that."

"For heaven's sake, let me go—I must—it is a case of life and death," panted Daines, and he was allowed to pass, but the difficulties increased, and as he strove to get to the principal entrance he was forced into the stream passing to one of the extra exits, opened only at the close of the performance. This would, he knew, take him into one of the side streets some distance from the front, but there was no help for it, and trembling with excitement, his head completely in a whirl, he had all he could do to get out. This achieved, he was in another crowd, and ran round to the main entrance, from which the principal stream of people was pouring out.

Everyone seemed to be fighting against him. The great staircase was blocked by those descending, and the sides thronged with servants on the watch for their people, many of whom were hanging back till their carriages were brought up, and the perspiration streamed down Daines' face as he strove to mount.

At the first broad landing the throng was so thick above him, that he felt certain that the people were gathered round the scene of a terrible catastrophe, and his heart nearly stood still.

At last he caught sight of her at the top of the staircase on his left. She was close against the wall, with a police officer by her side.

Cyrus Daines' brain was pretty active, though his body was approaching the state of utter exhaustion, as he mounted the last few stairs. He could see Lucy's face now, apparently with the features set in solid despair, and her eyes fixed and staring over his head down towards the door.

"Too late," he muttered, and without heeding the people about her, he forced his way to her side.

(To be continued.)

Then, as the applause was thundered forth, he saw Braetoun hurry his wife out of the box.

"That's right," muttered Daines. "Wise of you to get away. She won't meet them now. Good thing I was with her; it did calm her down. Poor girl, what a crucial position! I don't wonder at her fit of jealous rage. She must be beginning to feel guided a little by what I say. What a burlesque life is, she said. Poor little lassie! it is sometimes."

And all the while there were calls for the company, the throwing of bouquets, and Daines tried to see whether Lucy threw hers on to the stage as a compliment to old friends.

A large one did fall from overhead which seemed to be hers; but he had thought so much of her when in that box that he had paid little heed to the flowers, or he would have known that it was not—in fact, Lucy had left her box before the Braetouns

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KEY TO JUMBLED STORY NO. 6.]

THE PERFECT LOVE OF A GOOD WOMAN.

"OUR love is perfect, if ever love was," the man of our story would say to the girl a hundred times. She would nestle closer to him, and he would take her in his arms, and the love would shine from her eyes. They had been very happy, these two, but now the Great Wheel of Fate had turned its ugly side towards them, and they must part. The man was to go away to the great land across the water, there to earn fame and wealth, and to make a home for his love. She was to stay behind and wait for him.

And now their last day together had come. They left their dingy lodgings early in the morning, and walking to the station, they took a train away from the Great Black City, down into the green country. It was a lovely day early in July; the sun was shining brightly down from a cloudless sky, as they left the little way-side station, and went to the fields. They walked on the newly-cut, sun-browned hay. They turned it over with their feet, and a sweet scent came up from the fresh, green grass beneath.

They did not say much; only the man's face was very pale, and every now and again the tears sprang into the girl's eyes. Occasionally their hands would seek each other in sympathy, and then the man would take the girl's soft fingers in his own great, strong ones and gently stroke and fondle them.

The world seemed very happy that day. The sun was shining so brightly, the birds sang so merrily, and whistled to each other in the trees, while the swallows flew about in graceful curves, twittering playfully. In the next field a carter was calling to his horses as they pulled at the rake, while the regular "click" of the machine, as the hay dropped down in bundles from it, came floating over the hedge.

Thus they wandered about the live-long morning in the sweet-scented meadows. Then, when they grew tired, they turned aside into a wooded, green-grassed glen, where the tall pines grew straight out from the soft soil, and where rocks were to be found, and where a gurgling stream went splashing down at the foot of the little valley. Here they found a shady resting place, and unstrapping the small luncheon basket that they had brought, they spread out their feast, and made a pretence of eating. They uncorked a small bottle of champagne, and with this they each pledged the health of the other, for joy, and happiness, and good luck.

Afterwards they washed the plates in the stream, and the girl packed up. The man stood above her, looking down on the worn-out little hat that he loved so well, on the shabby coat and the faded skirt, and on the little black shoes and stockings which tried so hard to look bright and new. The girl knew that his loving, earnest glance was resting upon her, and there was a flush on her cheeks, and tears in her eyes as she gazed up at the sad, handsome face above her.

When the packing was finished they sat down together again, and there, beneath the waving trees, by the splashing stream, they made their vows. They whispered sweet words to each other, and talked of the future. But these things are not for other ears.

So the man went away.

Five years later he wrote this letter:

"MY DARLING LITTLE GIRL,—All is ready, everything is prepared for you, come out to me at once. At last I shall meet you again. Every moment of the past five years I have yearned for this time. Sleeping and waking I have thought of nothing but you. And now the time has come. I only want you—I would to heaven that I could have written before. Three weeks ago I was starving—I had not a penny in the world. But this is a wonderful land, and my old luck came back to me, and then, as they say out here, 'I struck it rich.' So come out to me, at once, my darling, I will tell you all when I see you. I cannot write much now. Do you remember when we worked together in that dingy warehouse. How sad it all was, and yet, even then, we were very happy. But we shall be a thousand times happier now, after these five long years of weary waiting.—Your own Boy."

P.S.—Notes inclosed.

The girl was sitting alone in a little room at the top of a big tenement building when the postman brought her this letter. She opened it eagerly, and the notes fluttered down on the floor. Putting the letter on one side, she stooped hastily down to collect them. She counted them up, and then she kissed the thin pieces of paper, and, going to the door, called loudly for her landlady. She paid her bill, and, telling the good woman that she might keep the few belongings that she left behind her, she went hastily down the steps, and hailing a cab, drove rapidly away from the slums, and presently sprang out at the door of a fashionable costumiers. Here she ordered an extravagant outfit. After that she drove to an hotel, and it was not until she sank down in an easy chair, after having finished a sumptuous lunch, that she thought of her lover's letter. She read it through, and then put it lightly on one side.

"Hasty boy," she said, "how eager he his."

Looking up the steamers, she found that there was one which left for America the next day. She turned over the page, and settled to take a boat which went three days later.

"I must enjoy myself here, now that I have the chance," she said to herself.

Her lover on the other side of the Atlantic watched impatiently every liner that came in. One day, when he was at his post as usual, his eye was attracted by the magnificent dress which a woman, who was standing near, was wearing. Suddenly he started eagerly forward—how well he knew every line of that face and figure. It was absurd of him to have supposed that she would have come out in the little worn hat, and the shabby coat.

At that moment the girl turned round. Her eyes met his but she did not appear to notice him. The man restrained himself, and then the girl, in all her finery, swept past him. He followed slowly, with a strange sinking at his heart, and presently saw her enter a carriage.

He motioned the driver to stop, and then with renewed hope, and with a smile on his face, he sprang on the step and stood before her.

The girl looked at him for a moment, and then drew back, and called to the driver to proceed.

"It is something like him," she was saying to herself, "but it is not the same man. My boy was tall and clean shaven and straight as an arrow. Bah! I could never love a man like that. How rugged looking he was!"

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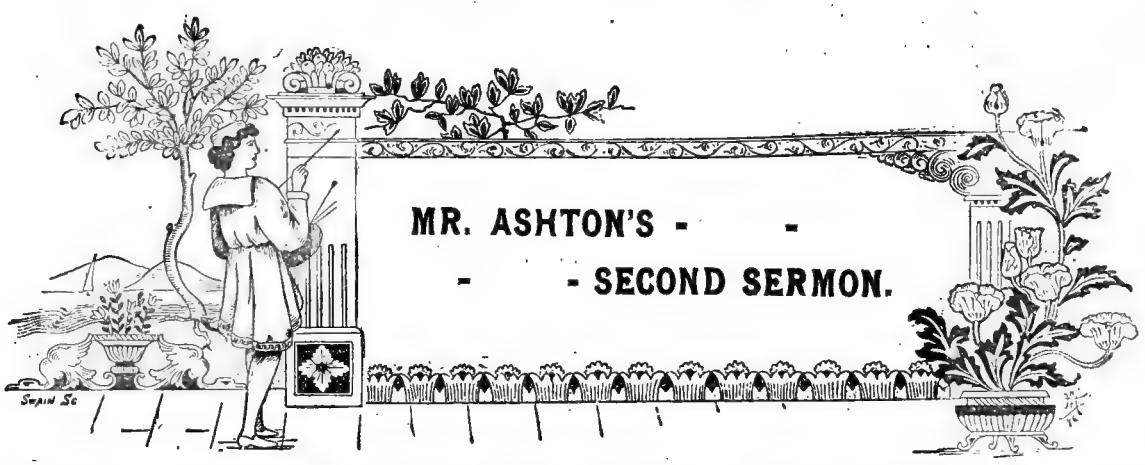

MR. ASHTON'S - - - - SECOND SERMON.

Her bold, black eyes stared at him as he went by the open bar-room door. She stood on the threshold, and Mr. Ashton flushed at her smile as he passed. She had long since ceased to blush, others might do it for her, but she was in no wise ashamed of her appearance. Strangely out of place she looked in the garish light, laughing and joking with the rough men near her. Such a girlish embodiment of the vice he was seeking the young minister was not prepared to behold. The heavy-footed, coarse-faced men, smoking strong-smelling pipes and sickening cigars, the imitation dandies, with swaggering gait and flaring neckties, they seemed to belong to the vicious place. But the girl, with her handsome face, plump arms and shoulders, bare as if she were in a ballroom, and her scanty pink dress barely reaching to her knees, she was startlingly incongruous. So young, so pretty, so hardened, going down so swiftly to the gates of hell! Ah, it was pitiful.

The Rev. Edward Ashton sighed compassionately as he went into the hall adjoining the bar-room. A few lamps ranged along the walls shone dully through a blue haze of tobacco smoke. Long, wooden settees covered the floor, which was dirty and uncarpeted. It was Saturday night, and a larger number than usual of men and youths lounged upon the seats or gathered in groups about the hall, across the rear end of which extended a stage, with footlights and curtain. A low, dingy-white gallery, connecting with the stage and running half-way round the room, was divided into a dozen or more little stalls, called "wine-rooms." In them, certain moneyed and reckless patrons of the place could sit at their ease while drinking and viewing the stage and scene below, or they could, with curtains, screen themselves completely from the public gaze, as they preferred.

His first sermon, delivered the Sunday before, had made a profound impression. It had set all the better portion of the community to talking about this plague spot. The Mirror printed the sermon in full, with warm editorial indorsement. It applauded his earnest, fiery declaration that he would not, could not, discuss dogmas and creeds living or dead, till he had done his best to start a crusade against the pestilential sin at their very doors. Until this foul snare—which was set before their eyes openly, but into which even the boys from his Sunday-school were blindly walking—until this was destroyed, there was no higher or holier duty to perform, no more vital theme to dwell upon. It was a strong stirring blast from a mail-clad warrior, who did not seek in distant lands for the foe in his own house.

With the crusading spirit strong within him, Mr. Ashton, in the midst of his preparation of his second sermon, determined to slip out of his study quietly and see the monster of vice with his own eyes. Then, returning with its hideous visage still fresh in mind, he could vividly describe it on the morrow.

So, taking a seat well up to the stage, for he was rather near-sighted, he looked about him. It could scarcely be pharisaical, he thought, with a shudder of disgust, to thank the Lord that he was not as some other men were—such as those around him. What enjoyment could they get out of such repulsive places? The foul air was hot and nauseating. Already he felt slightly feverish, and his head was beginning to throb. There was none of the glitter and glare which he had expected to find. But, of course, it was early yet; he would wait as best he could for the curtain to rise.

The whining of a fiddle, followed by the clamour of a small orchestra, interrupted his thoughts, and presently up went the lights and the curtain. It was a variety performance, somewhat above the average. Mr. Ashton was forced to confess to himself that the stage performance was a deal more innocent than the surroundings. To be sure, some of the actresses appeared in tights, and all of them wore abbreviated skirts, but so, he knew, did actresses occasionally in theatres and opera-houses of the higher respectability. Stamp out the bar and wine-rooms, and there would be nothing so very debasing about the resort he decided. And after that he made no more mental memoranda. For upon the stage came one who instantly caught and held his serious, short-sighted eyes as none had done before. He leant forward breathlessly, his heart beating like a sledge-hammer, a scarlet line on either cheek. The voluptuous form, so freely displayed, did not affect him in the least, but the face—the face! he could see nothing else.

It thrilled him with a nameless ecstasy, the arch glance from the sparkling eyes, the pouting red lips, the curves of chin and cheek guiltless of paint, it was to him no gaudy dancer, but a living picture, suddenly advancing from out of a hidden nook of a half-forgotten time. Who—who was she? Of whom did she so vividly remind him? He caught up his flimsy programme: "Belle la Reine, the famous Queen of the variety stage." It was a lie. She was not a creature of that sort. Did she look at him then? Did she know him, though he could not recognise her? His hands grew moist as he twisted the

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programme round them nervously. She sang to him alone, of that he was positive, and if he could have seen himself as she saw him, his clear-cut intellectual face standing out in sharp contrast to the heavy features around him, he might not have wondered that she looked at him as she did.

Her dancing, though graceful, annoyed him; her songs he did not hear, except one that told of bygone love, *that* stirred him strangely. She seemed to talk to him with her eyes, and held him spellbound. But it could not last for ever. She vanished the way she had come, and with a choking gasp he realised that she was gone. For him the lights were out, the performance ended. He sat dazed for a few minutes, and then, grasping his hat, was about to leave his seat, having seen much more than he came to see, when a boy touched his elbow and handed him a slip of paper. Seeming intuitively to know what it meant, he unfolded the note and read at a glance:

"An old friend would like to see you. Follow the boy."

He was comparatively a stranger in the city, probably nobody in the hall knew him. But he did not stop to reason. Certainly he could not be blamed for following the boy to see an old friend. He had no thought of turning back even when his small guide led him into the low gallery, by way of the side-door near the stage. Before he fully realised where he was, he stood in one of the dimly-lit wine-rooms, alone with the queen of the variety stage. She sat with her back to the audience-room below, between which and her snowy shoulders was a dingy curtain. Still arrayed in her scanty dancing attire, her dainty, silvery shoes elevated to the edge of a round table upon which were bottles and glasses, she coolly surveyed him.

"You wished to see me?" he said hesitatingly, advancing a step.

"Certainly," she replied, taking her feet off the table and rising; "but I don't want to see you as white as a ghost. What is the matter?"

"It is the foul air below. I am not used to it, and I have had a few dizzy spells lately," he murmured unsteadily, leaning on the table as, for an instant, even she seemed blurred and far-away looking.

She came to him at once, took his hat from his nerveless hand, and ran her cool fingers soothingly over his aching forehead.

"Here, down with this and you'll feel better," she said, pouring out some liquor from one of the bottles. He recoiled with a shudder, put the glass from his lips, and stepped back.

"You mistake," he said gravely; "I am not a frequenter of this place—I am a clergyman."

"As if I didn't know you," she laughed gaily; "and to think you don't know *me!* Don't you really recognise me? Come, look at me, once, good and hard, and see if I am not an old friend."

She poised airily before him, and then, as he still seemed puzzled, she said softly:

"Ned!"

A flame of red shot across the Rev. Edward Ashton's pallid face.

"Olive! Olive Faveur! My God! is it *you?*" he whispered, and sank into a chair by the table, staring at her dumbly, she still smiling. The minister was a young man, but his heart had once been wrung by this same fair woman. No, not the same. That was years ago, and she was then not as she must be now. Equally enthralling she had been to him then, though! and most terribly had she disappointed both him and all her friends. She it was who had turned his life-course. In the bitterness of his sorrow over her mad conduct he had set his face heavenward. And he had not known her that night till then!

There is an excellent story by Mr. George Griffith just commenced in "Pearson's Weekly." It is entitled, "Briton or Boer?" and deals with the fight for supremacy in South Africa.

She saw that he was profoundly moved, but she did not know how fiercely he was trying to crush back the feeling which burnt in his eyes as he looked at her.

Perching on the table, she caught hold of his hand and began to talk to him of old times. But he did not listen to her. He was conscious of the squealing of the orchestra violins, the stamping of heavy feet, and the tomfoolery upon the stage. In the adjoining stall he heard a drunken man trying to sing a ribald song with a woman, who was laughing at the maudlin attempt. Presently, though soft fingers held his own and a fascinating face was close to his, though satiny shoulders were so near him—presently he would rise and put Satan from him.

But he could not do it instantly. She was so frankly joyous, so merrily bewitching, not a repellent line from her laughing eyes to the tiny shoes whose heels she was knocking together as she sat before him. With an inward wrench he shut his eyes, and was about to stand erect and forbidding, when he was shocked by a chuckling laugh behind him. Withdrawing his hand from hers, as if from the touch of fire, he turned his head with a guilty flush. A man in a flaxen wig and comedian's stage-garb, stood in the curtained doorway.

"I know that they're guilty; but oh, they're *so* sly!" laughed the intruder, repeating a line of a topical song he had just been singing on the stage, and bowing low, he disappeared.

Mr. Ashton reached for his hat, the flush dying out of his face and leaving it very pale. But she put out her hand restrainingly, a quick glitter of anger melting to tenderness in her marvellously expressive eyes.

"It's only Jack," she said hastily; "don't mind him nor his impertinence."

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"Jack?" questioned Mr. Ashton hoarsely, wavering again under her glance.

"Yes," she said carelessly; "but he never troubles me. I do as I please in all things. You needn't think of retreating now, though. He has caught you, fairly or unfairly. If you went now he would be sure to have it in the morning papers, and make a few shillings out of the scandal, don't you see. But if you will bide a wee, and be sociable and sensible, I'll answer for it that not a whisper from him gets to the sensitive ears of your goody-goody friends."

Each word sank like burning acid deep into the young minister's heart. His face grew ghastly, and the little red-curtained stall swam round and round, the bright creature leaning towards him seemed to be receding in a luminous mist.

"Olive, Olive!" he gasped, reaching out wildly towards her.

"My poor old puritan Ned," she said softly, sinking on her knees before him; "let this and me cheer you. For once forget everything but that you and I are here; neither of us will ever be here again, and never again, perhaps, will be together. Drown care and enjoy yourself, Ned, dear old boy."

She lifted the glass he had once rejected to his lips. He, this time, clutched it, and, though it was not wine, but a far stronger liquor, he drank it to the last drops as if it were cooling water.

* * * * *

In the grey of the Sunday morning, while the town was still slumbering, a tall, black-coated priestly figure stole homeward like a belated night-thief. Snow had fallen during the darkness, and the wide street of the town was smooth and trackless, white and soft as wool beneath his hurrying feet. His footprints, showing a black trail behind him on the stones, seemed to his feverish eyes to mark the passage of a foul thing over the dazzling purity, each step defiling the spotless way. Reaching his residence, he let himself in with his latch-key, and, in another minute, noiseless as a burglar, he was hidden in his study.

Brazen bells clanged out in the crisp wintry air, calling to church the just and the unjust, earthly saints and human sinners. The broad streets, housetops, and fences gleamed in the sun, each evenly incrusted with frozen jewels by the gentle snowfall. The ringing laughter of boys snowballing one another by the kerb-stones, mingled with the music of the bells.

Ladies in furs and silks, gentlemen in overcoats and broadcloth, followed the soft-footed ushers up the richly-carpeted aisles to the luxurious pews. Flowers rare and costly were before the pulpit, and added to their fragrance were the delicate perfumes from numerous fairer roses in the shape of the city's most beautiful daughters. The pews were filled to the last one. It was a great congregation—the greatest the church had ever held. So the reporter decided, as he sharpened his pencils and noted the prominent men present, from the mayor down.

The fame of the young minister's eloquence had gathered together all of the city's leaders to listen to his second sermon. But he was late in appearing. Minute after minute went by, the organ ceased to sound and then began again. The official chief of the church's laymen grew uneasy. It would be a great pity to disappoint such a splendid assembly by an untimely sick-headache. He did not know that the young minister might even then be working at his sermon, with flaming eyes and trembling fingers, trying to make up for lost time. But he did know that the Rev. Mr. Ashton had not looked over strong. Finally, he slipped into his overcoat and went out in search of the tardy preacher. It was but a few steps to the pastor's residence.

"Mr. Ashton, I think, is still in his study," said the housekeeper; "I have not seen him this morning."

"But it is late," protested the churchman in soft indignation at such thoughtlessness. Eloquence was not punctuality, and there were the mayor and the highest people in the city kept waiting. He tapped sharply at the study-door, then he called and shook the knob. Then, finding the door locked, and being assured by the now alarmed housekeeper that the minister must be there, he, being a strong man, and by this time excited, burst the lock and flung open the door.

In the chilly study, darkened by the drawn curtains at the windows, nothing but cold ashes in the grate, the minister lay sleeping his last sleep. Drawn up to his writing-table upon a lounge was extended his black-coated form. The upturned face, though rigid in death, yet showed lingering upon the white lips a tender smile, as if in the solemn repose he had been visited by a pleasant dream. A bottle labelled "chloral" stood upon the table. The churchman groaned in horror:

"He must have felt nervous and taken an overdose! He has been dead for hours."

Beneath the bottle lay two scraps of paper, upon one was pencilled:

"An old friend would like to see you. Follow the boy."

Upon the other, a trembling scrawl, the pencil still beside it:

"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

CHARLES ROBERT HARKER.

JUMBLED STORY COMPETITION.

No. 9.

Six Prizes, one of £5 and five of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the next page in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, but the title and author's name are jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, August 31st.

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JUMBLED STORY. No. 9.]

INSIDE OF THE FARM.

To look at him and Miss Erskine, you would have settled down on him. He was no longer impatient, and instead of being the worst, had developed into the best conspirator.

Johnson blew a big cloud of tobacco smoke.

"I tell you, Arnold, you are making an ass of her. Miss Ralston is a fine girl, old fellow, but a hard party to a burglary, or hatching conspiracy against the development of a pet case.

"Sit down, old man," said the other; "I do believe it is clear that you showed your hand too soon. The success of the whole business will be in your chucking something like a groan, "but what can I do? If I only have no scruples about employing artifices, why should your cousin, Miss Erskine, promised to marry me yourself."

"You need not say any more about it," said Arnold, oblivious to the fact that there is a Miss Ralston in the hat.

"The girl doesn't want me, Johnson, that's clear."

"I do," said Johnson, wringing his hand with a vigour which his friend had suddenly and unexpectedly played tennis together, and were generally inseparable. It will be very easy to see from the way Miss Ralston said they were friends of very long standing. His scheme had told him that she had been told all about throwing away his half-smoked cigar and picking up his expression of his face.

On the evening of Miss Erskine's arrival, he dressed Johnson, in the drawing-room, showed no signs of that infernal reserve of yours to the dogs. You must with the keen eye of a doctor observing the details and conscious participation, though the proposer of the idea of a man proposing to a woman he has known only to serve as a tool in this way?" asked Arnold dubiously. of affairs."

"Oh, it is very simple," said Johnson; "and I shall know how the plot had progressed during his absence.

"There is no use," said Arnold wearily; "and, besides, that I have an idea. I'm going to do you a good turn. Leave it to me to find out for you what is the exact state that made the other wince; "and I hope she won't be into the spirit of the thing. But remember this, the triumph was increased, though it was dashed by just a night, but I can't, and that's the end of it. Why would we?"

All Arnold's old mopishness has flown away, too. I stay?"

"I know I am," said the individual addressed, with little remorse, as he saw Miss Ralston watching them leave it in my hands. You shall see how she will enter this afternoon."

With many misgivings, Arnold consented to be a party with a peculiar look in her eyes.

But the young girl who was sitting beside Mrs. Johnson felt that his plot was going to be a success, surprised, though she tried to hide it, when told that Arnold was the first person he saw as he descended from the situation and had given her promise of assistance.

"It is not clear that the girl does not want you, but you'll make a mess of it. What is your plan?"

But Mrs. Johnson said nothing.

"Splendidly," said Arnold; "you shall be the first to be as light as air, and go about with her as if quite angry with me for planning the deception we played on the train.

"But what will the other girl say? Will she consent to-day."

Finally, she asked him how long Arnold and Providence had cut him out for a diplomatist.

Among those who came in later was Miss Ralston. The hero and substituted heroine walked together, away?" said he, with a fine professional interest.

"We won't have to keep it up much longer," said Mr. State.

He knew that there was something wrong from the place."

Early next week he had to go up to town. At the end Miss Erskine had known each other. She seemed developed.

Mr. Johnson gave her an opportunity of talking to himself with special care and went up to the house. He was prepared to be very ill at ease with his fellow-girl in the world, and would do anything for me. Just serves her right to get this lesson."

During the next week the comedy progressed gaily. The consciousness of coming success seemed to have them passing the place where the lady sat for whose bow stiffly.

"Well how have things been going while I was to the deception. He felt as if he were a prospective company in the world.

Every sign given by the person deceived he watched when he saw Arnold take no more notice of her than to not make a mess of it. I shall supply her with a rival.

He wondered a little at the gift for realistic acting takes it how you really stand in her eyes. Since women is coming down to stay with us. She is the dearest one to manage."

Johnson one day told his wife that he believed him, but she made no allusion to the other couple for a three days!"

"Oh, I'll make that square. My cousin, Miss Erskine, had the courage I would clear out of Brighton this very long time.

"Miss Ralston!" said Arnold; "why, my dear boy, of three days he came back. He was quite curious to congratulate me, old man. It was all settled Johnson; "that is gloriously well acted."

"She does care for him," he said to himself; "but it they had met for the first time that day.

One evening on the pier, Mr. and Mrs. Johnson was benefit the play was arranged.

MRS. MAGDEIOR

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THE YOUNG RECRUIT.

From the Russian of W. Korolenko.

It was Easter Eve, 187—.

For some hours it had been dark. Still warm from the heat of the day, caressed by a faint breeze, the earth exhaled the sunlight it had absorbed in a light mist through which the rays of myriads of stars shone fitfully.

All was quiet in the little town pending the hour of the Easter dawn which the bells of the Cathedral would announce. But, hushed as the town was, it did not sleep, and, in spite of the darkness which reigned everywhere, and of the deserted streets, one became conscious of a feeling of expectancy, of some impending event for which all were waiting. From time to time a workman, who had been detained to finish some preparation for the morrow's festival, would pass on his homeward way, then all would be still again.

The moon had not yet risen and the little town was lying in the shadow of a hill crowned by a large and gloomy building, from each angle of which there rose a tower, its pointed roof standing out dimly against the sky.

Presently, from the cathedral belfry, a single bell rang out upon the night air. And, in a moment, every church took up the signal, warning the inhabitants of the near approach of the hour all were awaiting.

* * * * *

On the hill the gloomy door of the prison opened, and a half-company of soldiers marched out to relieve the sentries.

They made the circle of the walls, stopping here and there. The group halted at each post, and a single form detached itself from the black mass, its place being taken by another shape which advanced towards the relief out of the blackness of the night. Then the soldiers resumed their march.

On the western face a young recruit took up his post. His movements, still clumsy and undecided, proclaimed the newly-conscripted rustic, and his face bore an expression of strained attention which betrayed his inexperience.

He turned his face to the wall and grounded his rifle, then with a half-turn brought himself shoulder to shoulder with the man he was relieving. The latter repeated his orders.

"From one angle to the other—be on your guard," he murmured hurriedly.

The recruit listened with attention; over his face there flitted a shade of melancholy.

"Understand?" asked the corporal of the guard.

"Yes."

"Well, keep your eyes open. It's nothing to be nervous about, Fadéiff," he added, "goodness! man, you're not a woman!"

The relief resumed its march and disappeared behind the angle of the tower. The new sentry, rifle on shoulder, slowly paced the length of his beat.

* * * * *

As the last sound of the bell died away the stir of life began to show itself inside the prison. The doors of the cells were opened and the prisoners, each clad in his *khalate*, the fatal club-shaped piece of coloured cloth, corresponding to the English broad-arrow, sewn on to the middle of his back, came out one by one, forming long processions in the corridors. Two by two they passed into the prison church and, turning right and left, filled two inclosures guarded by strong and high palisades. Save the cells in the four corner towers the prison proper was now empty, excepting that in one of the common rooms a sick man was left lying on his plank-bed. The warder, warned of his sudden illness, came to examine him.

"Ivanoff! do you hear me, Ivanoff?" he called.

The prisoner did not stir. He murmured some unintelligible words in a muffled voice, moving his swollen, parched lips with effort.

"To the infirmary to-morrow," the warder ordered.

He left the room, leaving the watchman he had brought with him at the door. The latter scrutinised the invalid closely. "Ah!" he muttered, nodding slowly. "Prison life is nearly over for you, I fancy."

Decidedly there was nothing to be done, no object to be gained by remaining. He went to the door of the church, leaving the prisoner alone, and followed the service attentively, crossing himself and bowing every moment.

The wanderings of the delirious convict alone broke the silence of the deserted room. He was a man of middle age, strong and muscular. Fate had treated him unkindly; he had escaped from imprisonment in Siberia, braving a thousand dangers in crossing the Steppes, impelled by one motive, an incurable home-sickness. To see his native village, his own people once more, were it only for a month, a day, an hour—then, come what might.

But within a hundred versts of home, having accomplished so much of his perilous journey, he was re-captured and thrown into the prison where he now lay, apparently dying. He ceased to wander, his eyes opened, and his breathing became normal. Presently he sat up, staring straight in front of him, and a gleam of reason flashed across his face. He saw before him—this convict imprisoned for life—an open door!

With a single bound he was in the corridor. Some one left the church, holding the door ajar for a moment, and the sound of chanting, softened by the distance, fell upon his ear. He thought of the church in his native village, overshadowed by the rustling branches of the great pines, filled with old friends of his youth; how often at this season he had heard the same chant there!

* * * * *

The young recruit, armed with his rifle, paced his beat. Before him, as far as the eye could reach, stretched the vast plain, as yet hardly clear of the winter's snow. A soft breeze blew, the long grass of last year bending and rustling under it.

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The sentry halted, his back to the wall, and letting the butt of his rifle slip to the ground, he placed his hands on the muzzle, resting his head on them. He no longer asked himself why he was there this Easter Eve, gazing out over the deserted plain. In all respects he was still a simple peasant, not grasping many things familiar enough to soldiers as a rule. It was so short a time since he was free, master of his own welfare, his own fields, his own labour. And now some instinctive fear, inexplicable, motiveless, pursued his every step, breaking in his simple nature by sheer force of stern discipline.

He, too, saw his village; the same soft breeze blew there, the church was lighted up, and above it, also, rose the great, rustling pine trees.

Just above where he was standing, a black patch appeared over the crest of the wall; it was a man's head. The fugitive scanned the plain and the dim outline of the shadowy forest which lay on the horizon. He drew a long breath of fresh night air, and, hanging by his hands, let himself drop to the ground.

* * * * *

The joyous clanging of the church bells rang out upon the air. In the prison the door of the church swung open and the long procession of convicts defiled into the courtyard. The soldier drew himself to his full height and, baring his head, prepared to cross himself. His hand raised to his forehead, he stood petrified with astonishment. The escaping prisoner had just reached the ground.

"Halt! halt!" the sentry cried, raising his rifle.

The hidden fear which had previously weighed upon him like a nightmare took form and fled. "Duty." "Responsibility." The words passed like lightning through his brain. He raised his rifle to his shoulder and covered the fugitive, but before firing he closed his eyes.

In the town now, the joyous carillons were pealing, and the prison bells still filled all the air with melody, while from the church, in waves of glorious sound came the triumphal song "Christ is risen."

On the other side of the wall, above all the music of bells and organ there rang out the sharp report of a rifle. A stifled cry, a groan, answered it immediately, and then all was silence, broken only by the echoes of the rifle's report, and the dying vibrations of the bells.

Barely Saved.

All London was flocking to the exhibition. Among all the busy pleasure-seeking crowd one person seemed to find no interest or amusement in his surroundings.

Seated on a chair in the gardens, his legs outstretched before him, his crush hat tilted over his eyes, Guy Merivale presented a picture of despair. His smart evening dress, his polished boots and fastidiously correct tie, seemed to mark him as a member of society unlikely to be troubled by lack of money. But, as a matter of fact, Guy was at this moment fingering in the recesses of his pocket the last few sovereigns he owned in the world.

A clerk in the Foreign Office, he had never found the service of his country either pleasant or profitable; and now the sudden death of an uncle had deprived him not only of a liberal allowance in the present, but also of that provision for his future which an unsigned will had contemplated.

An unusual knowledge of languages and much acquaintance with foreign countries might have served him well in his career; but he had little interest in high circles to advance his claims. The only vacant appointment offered him was that of a minor consulship on the Gold Coast of Africa.

"The Gold Coast it must be, then," sighed Guy to himself.

He had been warned that his acceptance of even this offer must be immediate.

A shilling exhibition was a cheap amusement, and he thought that among its sights and sounds he could find time for solitary reflection if not for relief from his own thought.

A girl with blue eyes and fair wavy hair was moving through the crowd in front of him, leaning on the arm of a tall, soldierly looking man, evidently her father. Her nervous glances and shrinking attitude suggested that the situation was either novel or alarming to her.

"Why, Mabel," her companion whispered to her, "you are surely not afraid of a little crush like this? It is not so bad as the carnival crowd at Florence."

"Oh, don't talk of Florence, father," she replied. "I, can never think of Italy without remembering that terrible trial, when I had to give evidence against Ferari, who stabbed our butler."

"A contemptible wretch!" said her father. "Do not, think of him. Ferari was sentenced to the galleys for life; he won't trouble you any more."

The girl sighed.

"That's just what I can't help doing," she said. "I can never forget how he swore to be revenged on me wherever I went. As he was leaving the dock he turned to the crowd of villainous looking Italians who had come to give evidence for him, and cried out:

"'Ostia, remember your brother, Giulo, and remember also this white-faced, chattering English girl.'"

"Pooh! empty threats, child."

"It terrified me, though, when they muttered among themselves, and a black-bearded Italian held up his hand, and as he fixed his dark eyes on me, cried:

"'Giulo, I will remember; she shall not escape.'"

"Come, come, Mabel," said her father; "in England you need not fear an Italian Mafia. I may as well tell you that the man you thought was my secretary the other day is a detective, and is following us now. It was quite unnecessary, but it may give you an extra feeling of security."

"How dreadful, father!" exclaimed the girl, shuddering. "I always thought he was your new secretary."

"Not quite," laughed her father. "I've not been able to find one yet. The young Foreign Office gentlemen were all cuffs, collars, and red tape. I want to find some one with more character and backbone—someone I can depend on in an emergency."

Guy Merivale, who had been watching the girl with some interest, though pretty faces were no novelty to him, caught the word "dinner" as they passed. He was getting hungry himself, so he rose, and sauntering to a restaurant at the top of the garden chose a table in a retired corner. Hardly had he done so when the girl and her father entered and sat down at the next table, taking their seats with their backs towards him. As they did so the father made a signal, and a man who had been following them at a few paces distant stepped up to him.

"You can leave us for half-an-hour, Davis," he said. "You had better get some dinner for yourself."

The restaurant was almost deserted. But late as it was, Merivale did not feel inclined to move in search of other amusement. Not even the champagne could raise his spirits. He paid his bill, and, as his waiter cleared the table and disappeared, leant his head on his hands and gave himself up to his own gloomy thoughts. Had he been less abstracted he might have noticed the waiter at the next table regarding him intently.

"*Basta!*" he muttered to himself; "the great, drunken English pig sleeps."

At this moment Mabel's father called for his bill, and having paid it, remarked that he wanted to get a good cigar outside.

"And then," he added, "we'll go and listen to the band."

As her father left the room Mabel leant back in her chair, and through the open window near her watched the crowd as they moved in the lamplit gardens below. Humming over to herself the refrain of the music, she fell into a reverie, while queer fancies wandered through her mind, born of the spirit of the hour.

Suddenly the voice of the waiter broke in upon her meditations. Leaning over her, with his right hand on the back of her chair, he was offering her a glass of green Chartreuse upon a plate, held rather clumsily in his left hand.

"Will madame take a liqueur?" he was saying, in the soft tone peculiar to Italians.

"No, thank you," she replied shortly, impatient at being disturbed.

He bent his head rather close to hers, and there was an instant change in his voice.

"Madame will drink," he whispered; "she will also not scream nor move, else will I stab her to the heart." And through her dress she felt the sharp point of a stiletto pressed against her back.

"Has she forgotten Firenze?" he continued in a rapid concentrated whisper. "Behold Ostia Ferari!"

Another girl might have instantly screamed or fainted. Mabel felt turned to stone, as the blood ebbed cold from her heart.

There was a mist before her eyes, and a buzzing in her ears; and yet she could still hear the band playing a waltz, and she found herself thinking of the ball she was to have gone to that very night.

Slowly moving her head, she looked at the Italian with staring eyes, while her face turned white to the lips. Though his beard was gone, and his cheeks shaved clean and blue, she recognised the fierce black eyes she had seen in the court at Florence. And in those eyes she read—death.

"It is poisoned," she whispered in a faltering voice, as she gazed shrinkingly at the green, transparent liquid.

"And if it is," he answered mockingly, "it will not hurt. I would save the signora's white skin from an ugly mark—and my own neck. Quick, drink before the signor returns," he muttered, "or I will use the knife!" And she started as the sharp point of his dagger pierced her flesh.

Anything for a moment's time. Like a dove fascinated by the gaze of a serpent, she took the glass, and with her eyes fixed on his moved it to her lips.

As the rim touched them she saw a sudden spasm cross the Italian's face; a strong hand was pressing his neck, and in a moment he was hurled backwards.

Not an instant too soon. Guy Merivale at the next table had lost all thought of his pretty neighbour; but still the tune she was unconsciously humming caught his ears. Suddenly it had stopped, and the low whispers arrested his attention.

Looking up he saw the white, panic-stricken face of the girl over the waiter's shoulder; and beneath the napkin that covered his right hand as it rested on her chair he saw a bright knob, which, his Italian travels had taught him, was the hilt of a stiletto.

It was a moment for action rather than thought. Without a sound he moved his chair, till his long arm could reach the dagger, and then he threw himself on the Italian.

There was a crash of glass as the liqueur fell on the girl's dress—a hoarse *maledicto* as the Italian felt the stiletto torn from his grasp, and all was over.

Almost instantly her father entered the room, followed by the detective; and as the former bent over the girl with trembling lips, the latter seized the Italian.

"Neatly done, sir," he whispered to Merivale. "I will take good care of him. I know him now; the Italian police want him for a worse job than this. I will see that they get him."

The Italian was instantly hurried out of a side door by the manager and detective before the few occupants of the almost empty room had time to ask what was the matter.

"Your name, sir?" said the elder gentleman, turning to the younger man.

"Guy Merivale," he replied.

"Mr. Merivale, I owe you a thousand thanks;" and then he added tremblingly, "God bless you, sir; she is my only daughter."

Then, as he grasped his hand, he said:

"You will know my name, though we have never met. I think an application from you was handed to me on my return to the Foreign Office to-day. I am more than glad to owe this service to your father's son."

Drawing the young man aside, he continued:

"I see you have been appointed to the Gold Coast. I presume that you have no particular preference for that climate?"

"I can't say that I have," said Merivale, smiling; "but my letter will have explained. I have no choice."

"Then, Mr. Merivale, I will give you one. I heard to-night of your gifts as a linguist, and I have learned your coolness and courage. I have just been appointed Minister to one of the Balkan States. If you will accept the post of attaché to the legation and the duties of my private secretary, you will confer a personal favour on me. Come, no thanks, it is a bargain," he added, as Guy tried to express his gratitude; "and now let my daughter try and thank you."

Turning to the girl as she rose from her chair with swimming eyes and quivering lips, he said:

"Mabel, let me introduce to you Mr. Guy Merivale. I have found in him the son of an old friend—a gallant gentleman—and my new secretary."

PERCY WINCE.

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PAUPER BLUE BLOOD

BY WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

CHARACTERS.

SEFTON RAVENSCROFT.—Son of the late Sir Reginald Ravenscroft and a pauper, owing to his father's failure.

GEORGINA PLUFF.—A governess in the family until Sir Reginald's death, when she intimidates Sefton into marrying her.

JOHN PLUFF.—A wealthy retired grocer, and cousin to Georgina Pluff (Lady Ravenscroft). In return for attendance at his dinners and At Homes, he supplies her with money.

MRS. RATHBONE.—A widow of whom John Pluff is rather fond, to the disgust of Georgina, who anticipates becoming his sole heiress.

LADY NORAH CANNINGTON.—In love with Sefton but who is compelled by her father to break off the engagement, owing to the former's poverty, and marry the Duke of Malvern.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ILLNESS OF MR. PLUFF.

THE pool was deep, but a moment later an apparition past recognition struck out for the bank, while Mr. Pluff followed bewildered.

Mrs. Rathbone on finding her feet, pointed pleadingly to something that was floating down the stream.

"Oh! save it! save it!" she implored.

"What?" asked Mr. Pluff, wading towards her in his dripping flannels, his eyes too full of water to notice the pseudo widow's short grey curls.

"My wig. For mercy's sake get it back. Oh! you *foolish* old man!" as John gaped stupidly.

Then the embarrassing situation gradually crept over his shocked senses. Mrs. Rathbone was false to the very locks that had first fascinated him. Georgina was right, and that little red speck now almost out of sight—— But his train of thought suddenly took more practical form, as he saw the dejected woman sink in weeping anguish upon a mossy boulder.

Seizing a canoe paddle which had drifted ashore, he ran along the bank till he reached the tree beneath which they had moored. The wig caught in a low bough, and lay within easy reach of the paddle.

A moment later, Mr. Pluff retraced his steps sadly, bearing the last remnant of his shattered illusion.

Mr. Pluff retraced his steps sadly.

How poor a thing it seemed now, that bedraggled mass of wet, damp hair.

Mrs. Rathbone rose to meet him, her face strangely altered by the washing away of delicate pink powder, the revelation of wrinkles hitherto concealed.

She snatched the wig almost angrily from him, without a word of thanks for its rescue, and forced it in a sodden, unbecoming mass upon her head.

Her dress hung in limp ungainly folds about her figure, she was shivering and frightened, unnerved by the alarming possibility of having to return without her Titian headgear.

"We'd better get home and shift as fast as we can," said Mr. Pluff; "the canoe can't drift farther than the stepping stones, and I'll pay the lad for the damage."

He offered Mrs. Rathbone his arm mechanically, but she refused it, and marched ahead with her nose tilted in the air, and the drops from her dishevelled curls trickling down her collar.

Mr. Pluff paused to shake the sand out of his shoes, but save an occasional grumble for the discomfort he had been caused by his own clumsiness, their conversation was nil.

He walked with Mrs. Rathbone to her door, advised her to take "an 'ot bath," offering her his damp hand in parting.

She refused it however with set lips.

"Ain't you going to say good-bye? Let us part friends, eh, Mrs. R.?"

"I shall not forget or forgive your cruel words to me to-day, unless you will retract them, Mr. Pluff."

"I say what I mean, and I stick to it," he answered.

"I shall leave early to-morrow," replied Mrs. Rathbone. "But I cannot refrain from remarking that I am bitterly disappointed in you, my once friend!"

"*You* are disappointed! Well, that's funny! I thought the complaining would be all on my side. I'm the one that's been 'umbugged, remember!"

"You have shaken my faith in mankind, Mr. Pluff," she said, as a parting shaft as she turned away.

"And I'll be blessed if I ever believe in a woman again," he muttered to himself, walking back in a very different mood to the one in which he had started out.

Georgina met him in the garden. She flung up her hands, and rushed towards him.

"Oh! John, what *has* happened?"

"Well, it speaks for itself!" he replied, shaking his wet coat. "We've had a regular upset this afternoon all round. Georgina, my dear, kiss me!"

The tone in which he demanded this embrace chilled Lady Ravenscroft.

The worst had come, and she must congratulate him.

She obeyed half-heartedly. He did not look a prepossessing figure to caress.

"I'm well out of it, Georgie, my girl," he muttered wiping away the moisture round his eyes.

"Yes, you might have been drowned. I suppose you saved Mrs. Rathbone's life, and that is how it came to a climax."

"Lor, no! Mrs. R. swam like a fish. But oh, it *was* a climax!"

"And—and—you—are—going—to—marry—her?"

Georgina gasped the question faintly. Her head reeled.

"Marry Mrs. Rathbone?"

His voice vibrated with rage.

"No, my eyes have been opened, and we've parted for ever."

Lady Ravenscroft flung her arms about John Pluff's stout shoulders, and hugged him in regular earnest. Her feelings were too great for words.

"Yes," he continued, "you were right from the first, you are always correct, Georgina, and I ought to have known, and been guided by your clever diagnosis of character. I'll stick to you, my lass, for the future, and not stray after false goddesses! The fact is, dearie, you're the only one I can trust, and, thank God, there are exceptions to every rule, but for the majority I say women are a dashed set of impostors, and I've done with them!"

"You dear old darling!" she cried joyfully; "I can't tell you how relieved I am that you are saved from Mrs. Rathbone. I always knew her to be untrustworthy — a sheep in wolf's clothing. Why, her very hair advertised the fact. But *do* tell me what she has done!"

"No, no, Georgie, I draw the line at that. What I have learned of her was told me in confidence, and not all the cajoling in Christendom would squeeze it out of me. I shall wipe her from my life!"

He seemed to have forgotten his wet clothing, and September evenings are treacherous.

Georgina reminded him.

"You will catch your death of cold," she exclaimed. "Do go in and change."

"These things have pretty well dried on me," retorted Mr. Pluff; "but there, I'm altogether bowled over, and too darned upset to take heed of anything. Not that I'm a very pretty spectacle, should any of your fine friends come driving up to the front door. At my age I ought to 'ave known better than to go canoodling off. Pity I did not take your advice again. It's wonderful 'ow everything you say comes true."

"Oh! don't stand talking, *dear* Cousin John," as his teeth commenced unconsciously to chatter, "or we shall have you laid up with one of those dreadful snuffling colds in the head that are so difficult to cure. Will you put your feet in mustard and water?"

Mr. Pluff grinned.

"I don't knock up easily," he declared in his boastful tone. "There's not a haler, heartier man drawing breath, what's never took an ailment since measles in infancy and mumps at school. Maybe I'll ask you for a drink of hot grog, but blow the mustard!"

So saying he stumped away, while Georgina murmured a prayer of thanksgiving for the downfall of Mrs. Rathbone.

An hour or so later Georgina found John Pluff pacing the verandah in dry clothes, as if to keep warm through movement.

"I 'ave taken a small chill, I reckon," he said. "Suppose it was standing about jawing in them damp things. I've just been talking to your young man," indicating Sefton, who was walking towards the stables.

"And what did he say?"

"'Go to bed, Pluff, that's the best place for you.' Then he felt my pulse just like a doctor, and said he should send off for his medical man at once."

Georgina's eyebrows raised themselves in expressive surprise. Sefton must think John bad to trouble his head about him—Sefton who was so very slack, and disliked her cousin into the bargain. She heard the hoofs of a horse trotting down the drive, and saw that her husband was the rider.

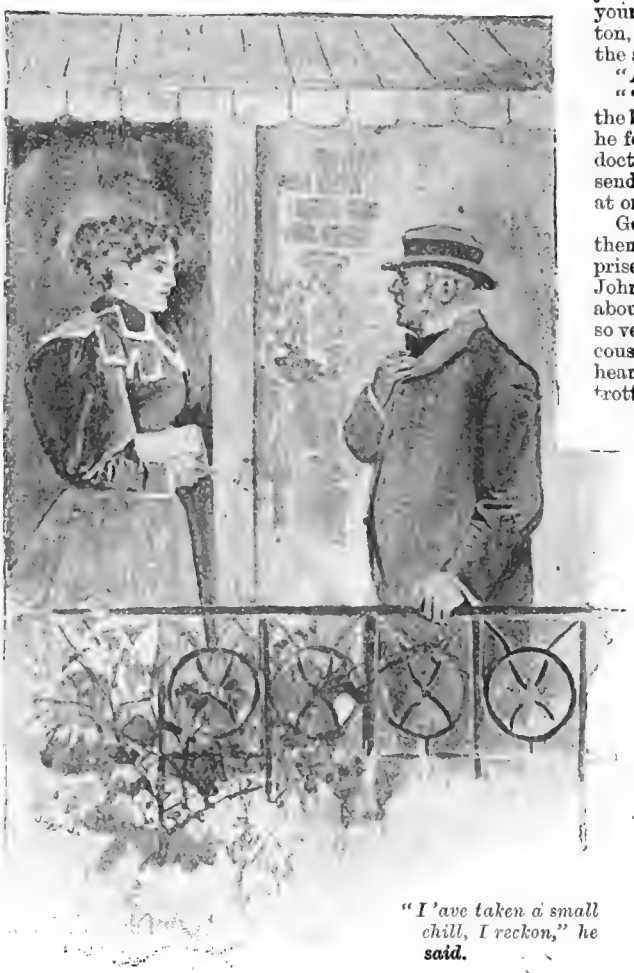
"How do you feel?"

"Queer and skeery like. First 'ot and then cold. Think I'll take your lad's advice, and get between the sheets. Don't you worry yourself, Georgie dear. I shan't be on the sick list long."

So he went off with an effort at whistling, which soon failed.

Lady Ravenscroft noticed he helped himself upstairs by the aid of the broad banisters.

She waited for Sefton's return uneasily. She did not appreciate the bother of an illness in the house. As he reappeared on his polo pony, she noticed the doctor's dog-cart following.



"I 'ave taken a small chill, I reckon," he said.

"Do you really think Cousin John is ill?" she said a trifle sharply. "You seem to be making a great bother about nothing. He has gone to bed, and will be all right in the morning. John has such a wonderful constitution."

But for once Lady Ravenscroft was mistaken. The doctor seemed disinclined to make light of the matter, and called early again on the following day.

The slight chill turned into acute pneumonia, and two hospital nurses were summoned from town.

Mr. Pluff was very placid and quiet. He spoke seldom, and then it was only to murmur "thank you," for some service rendered. His helpless condition aroused Georgina's pity. She watched by the bedside, quarrelled constantly with the nurses, and really shed genuine tears of sympathy when Mr. Pluff appeared in pain.

Sefton also frequently crept into the invalid's room,

and sat at the opposite side of the bed, watching Georgina.

This action of his irritated her. It seemed as if he planted himself there for a purpose. Once she caught his eyes fixed with keen scrutiny upon her hand, as she moistened John's lips from a glass of water. The look was one of suspicion—she read its meaning only too well. Sefton esteemed her so little, that he actually thought it necessary to remain on guard beside the old man he so genuinely despised.

She flew at him in a frenzy and shook his shoulders.

"What were you thinking of in there—by the bed?" she asked fiercely, when they were alone.

Sefton did not answer.

She flew at him in a frenzy and shook his shoulders.

"You didn't think—you couldn't—that—that—I should be such a fiend? Oh! husband, for the love of Heaven, swear you never doubted me! I may be bad, but God knows I would never be guilty of robbing a human life!"

"I would not trust you," he answered calmly, and but for the look in his eyes she would never have forgiven the words.

"He does not know what he is saying," she told herself. "The doctor must see *him* next."

CHAPTER XIX.

Georgina Becomes Wealthy.

"I WANT to make a will," said Mr. Pluff.

The words came very feebly. "Doctor," he continued, "I think I am going to die."

There was a pathetic ring of resignation in John's tone.

Georgina was standing at the foot of the bed, with her hands on the rails; she made no sign that she had heard, only her eyes wandered instinctively to the writing table.

The nurse fetched pen and paper at her patient's request. His hand was weak and he wrote with difficulty, then motioned to the doctor and nurse to sign their names. "Put it in an envelope and seal it down," he murmured, closing his eyes.

Georgina's heart beat furiously, she staggered to her customary seat beside him, and held his hand.

"If you should see Mrs. Rathbone," he said at last, after a long pause, "tell her I forgave everything. It's not worth while bearing a grudge into the other world, eh, Georgie?"

She bowed her head.

"And Nesta Pyne," he rambled on faintly, "she's married you know. I—I would not give her a present, because she laughed, but that don't matter now, do it dear? When I'm gone, send her my gold inkstand, with—with John Pluff's compliments. You'll find a card in the ivory case."

A hot tear dropped on the sheet. It fell from Georgina's eye.

"Ravenscroft Park will be a different place," muttered the failing voice. "I've left everything to you. When little John grows up, you'll tell him about his god-pa won't you, old girl?"

"Yes, yes," whispered Georgina, her eyes suddenly scintillating, and her breath coming and going in more laboured gasps than that of the dying man. Then silence again.

She watched the calm face on the pillow reverently, yet at the same time thinking of all that the passing away of Mr. Pluff meant to the Ravenscroft family. No longer paupered blue blood, and the fortune *hers*, not Sefton's.

The dream was to come true—at last—at last!

An hour or two elapsed, when Mr. Pluff took a decided turn for the worse.

His mind began to wander and he complained fitfully of the wet clothes in which he said he was made to stand, and frequently re-acted his hunt after Mrs. Rathbone's wig.

"Give me the paddle, Georgina," he cried. "It's there, by the tree. Can't you see it—all wet and red? Bah! there are weeds and slime in that pool; and I'm cold, Georgie, darned cold!"

Lady Ravenscroft laid her hand on his burning forehead.

Occasionally his mind travelled back to old days, and he would talk of the shop and the customers, mentioning many names Georgina had never heard.

But finally he sank into oblivion, resting peacefully like a child asleep, his breathing growing fainter and fainter, till, with his hand still clasping Georgina's, John Pluff drifted to the Unknown.

She watched the coming of Death's Angel in silent awe, her throat parched and her fingers damp with the sweat of dread as they touched that thing of clay, now white and cold, upon the quilt. Poor limp hand! with the large diamond ring she had so often protested against, flashing below the lifeless knuckle.

A hot tear dropped on the sheet.

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Both the nurses were in the room, and one led Georgina to the door.

"You shall come back presently, Lady Ravenscroft."

"It's all over," said his wife, taking his arm and drawing him indoors.

Walking slowly downstairs, she went in search of her husband. Already the servants were drawing down the blinds, and the hush of the still sleeper fell upon the house.

Sefton was crossing the lawn and thought that the sun was being shut out in this the hottest hour of the day. He did not guess that Cousin John was dead.

"It's all over," said his wife, taking his arm and drawing him indoors.

"Oh!" murmured Sir Sefton, shuddering slightly. "Is it?"

And that was all this strange couple said, but what they felt or thought no one but themselves knew. Each had shut the other out of their life, each felt the keen pang of intense loneliness, yet cherished no wish for union.

Georgina went to the nursery, and gathering her son in her arms bore him away to her own room. Here she walked to and fro, rocking the infant softly and talking to him in low excited words.

"John—Reginald," she whispered, "my own little Reggie—to-day has altered your whole future. You are the heir to a fortune now as well as a title, my precious, my sweet! Do you know what mother is saying?" straining him tighter to her heart. "You will have a great and grand career, with your namesake's money, and your grandfather Reginald's great mind. Only a very brave man kills himself when he knows that to live is to shame his illustrious name. Why," gazing in sudden surprise at the shape of the baby's brow, "you are even a little like him now. I have thought of him so often, feasted my eyes nightly upon his noble countenance in wild unearthly visions, that you have caught the look—it was born on your tiny face—an exquisite miniature—a photograph of my thoughts."

Georgina's dreams wandered far from the dead man in the lonely wing, lying in death's solemn majesty, to a brilliant mental picture of Ravenscroft Park, transformed by wealth's magic hand. It flung her into exultant ecstasies.

If Sefton knew, he did not realise it yet. He would look on her with deep respect, for money could buy everything, even the goodwill of a cold and distant husband. She would have all the county people at her feet—those who had looked at her askance, snubbed, or avoided her. She could show them now that the proud Sir Sefton had not made such a bad matrimonial bargain after all. It was something to be on the top rail for once—and stick there!

The sudden change in the horizon, the brightening of Georgina's sky, in the midst of gloomy death clouds, seemed to fill her with the elasticity of early girlhood. She might have been sixteen again, as she rocked her baby in her arms, and banished the remembrance of John's cold hand.

But Sefton had crept to that silent chamber, compelled, it seemed, against his will—for the sight of a dead body always unnerved and upset him.

"Poor old Pluff!" he murmured, as he went back to his study, "there's not a single soul to mourn you; not one life made blank and empty by your absence. I despised you, did I? What a fool I was! You are as good as the best of us now; no caste or rank has any place where you have gone. How I envy you!"

Georgina smothered her cousin's coffin in the costliest flowers, adorned herself in the most exquisitely-fitting black, cried a good deal at the funeral, and went abroad for her health immediately afterwards.

"Dear Mrs. Humphery knows how dreadfully I feel my poor cousin's loss," she told Sefton, "and has begged me to join her and Mr. Humphery in their trip on the Continent. They are such nice, cheerful people, I am sure it will do me good. You can stay with some of your numerous friends. In the meanwhile I have ordered the house to be re-papered and painted."

The money was Georgina's, and she meant to let her husband know it. She treated him now like the very dirt beneath her feet, while he watched her airs and affectations with quiet sarcastic amusement—an attitude new to him.

"I should like to see the papers before they are pasted

She snatched the papers away angrily.

on my walls, because if I disapproved of them it would necessitate having the work done over again."

She stared at him incredulously.

"I have to pay, so I should imagine the choice would be mine. But here are the patterns." She flung them across the table. "That is for the dining-room."

"I've no patience with your fusty old-fashioned notions, Sefton, and I want to make our home look stylish, for later on, when I am out of mourning, I mean to entertain on a very large scale. By about Xmas time we might begin our house parties and festivities."

Sefton's blood ran cold at the thought of his wife let loose

"Where did Sir Sefton offer you his hand and heart?"

"Vile taste!" he muttered. "Can't you see this sort of thing is not the least in keeping with old oak? Oh! and this for the hall," laughing outright in a peculiarly bitter strain, "really Georgina, if you want to deck up a house in such gaudy colours take a place of your own somewhere, and do not desecrate Ravenscroft Park."

She snatched the papers away angrily.

with a fortune. How she would brag and swagger! Why the very tone in which she mouthed the words 'our house parties' made him feel inclined to shake her. Besides which, gradually Sefton had grown to hate and abhor contact with his fellow men. Douglas Shirling, to whom he he was still devoted, noticed this painful shrinking and the eccentric ways of his friend; more than once he had

begged Sefton to see a doctor, but the suggestion was always received resentfully.

Georgina determined now, under these new circumstances, to hold her own. Sefton she considered a weak, unstable fellow, one she could ride rough shod over at will.

His opinion on the papers did not in the least alter hers, and she flounced out of the room with no intention of counter-ordering anything.

The following day they parted, and Sefton, believing that during his absence Ravenscroft Park would be left unmolested, joined his mother and sister without any apprehension.

Georgina, however, had laid her plans deeply, She was determined to lose no time. Besides the doing up of the house, she required an entirely fresh staff of servants. These she engaged before leaving England, not forgetting to send Nesta the gold inkstand with Mr. Pluff's card as requested, and writing a short note to Mrs. Rathbone. In it she gave a brief sketch of her cousin's peaceful passing away, quoted his words of forgiveness, and wondered if the General's wife would realise how deeply Georgina was indebted to her for that day's canoeing.

Once out of England with her friends the Humpherys, Lady Ravenscroft cast off her gloom and enjoyed herself immensely. Mr. Humphery was a merry, chatty little man, full of go, with a keen sense of humour, and a passion for caricaturing people on his cuffs. His wife existed merely for the vanities of this world, made a perfect science of the adornment of the human form divine, could prattle in rather a pretty voice for hours upon chiffons and bonnets, and took unlimited interest in the family affairs of her friends and acquaintances.

"So your husband is one of those dreadfully morose men that look on the black side of everything!" she said to Lady Ravenscroft, dropping her frivolous tone for one of genuine condolence.

"Yes, and the worst of it is I don't know *how* to wake him up!" sighed Georgina.

"Now take my advice, dear, for I have made a study of the masculine mind since the days of my teens: don't appear to *try* and rouse him, but fill your house with guests, mirth loving, light-hearted folk, who will make the old walls ring with their laughter. Surround him with all the luxury that your wealth can give, and gradually the depressed and gloomy individual will expand his wings like the newly released butterfly, so that you will forget he was ever a chrysalis!"

"Not a bad plan to work on. I know he is not in a hurry to return to Ravenscroft Park, and when he does a perfect transformation scene shall greet his astonished eyes."

"You are having the house re-decorated now, are you not?" said Mrs. Humphery. "Give a large party as soon as possible, for, after all, Mr. Pluff was only a cousin, and nowadays so little is made of mourning—it is going quite out of fashion."

"Yes; and poor John would not have liked me to grieve. He was always so considerate."

"A charming character. Quite an example," murmured Mrs. Humphery, remembering Georgina's anxiety anent Mrs. Rathbone. "Do you know," suddenly changing the subject, "this is the hotel my dear little Jacoby proposed to me in six years ago. I was travelling with my parents, and he followed us after the London season. I shall never forget what a fool he made of himself!" laughing softly.

"Do tell me, Lady Ravenscroft, when and where did Sir Sefton offer you his hand and heart?"

Georgina paled. Then in a chaffing tone replied:

"Oh, I proposed to him!"

"That is what people always say when they do not want to answer!" replied Mrs. Humphery, gathering from Georgina's intonation that she was joking.

(To be continued.)

Post-Card Competition.—No. 9.

THERE is a sentence somewhere in this number of *Short Stories*, the letters of which are intermixed. A guinea is offered to the person within 100 miles of London who first correctly transcribes it, and another guinea to the reader living a greater distance away. *Post-cards only, please.* Other forms of communication disqualified.

RESULT OF POST-CARD COMPETITION.

No. 7.

THE discrepancies which occurred between the illustrations and the text in *Short Stories*, dated August 15th, were six in number. The first post-card to hand containing one of the correct solutions, was that of Mr. F. Bonsier, of 18, Lyal Road, Bow, who points out that while the dog in "The Itinerary of Caliban" was described as a big, shaggy Russian terrier, he is portrayed in the illustration as rather small and smooth coated. The provincial guinea goes to Mr. W. W. Adams, 102, Cape Hill, Smethwick, Birmingham, who points out that the man in the sketch on page 199 should have been carrying a stick instead of an umbrella. Penknives have been sent to the following persons, each of whom were the first senders of the remaining four discrepancies: Mr. Arthur R. Exley, 101, Chestnut Avenue, Forest Gate; Mr. Thos. H. C. Barlow, 56, Iliffe Street, Newington, S.E.; Mr. Chas. J. Wright, 43, Warner Street, New Kent Road, S.E.; and Mr. J. F. Thorrold, Surveyor's Office, Redditch.

Result of Jumbled Story.

No. 6.

ONLY nine attempts in this competition were absolutely correct. To the £10 offered in prizes we have added 7s., and divided the whole among the following winners, each of whom therefore receives £1 3s.:

A. Stevenson, 26, Woodliffe Street, Harpurhey, Manchester.
A. Davis, 17, Eve Road, Leytonstone Road, E.
F. Mulvogue, 26, Woodliffe Street, Church Lane, Harpurhey, Manchester.
Miss Taylor, 10, East Bank, Stamford Hill, N.
R. W. Thompson, 40, Victoria Road, Holloway, London.
Miss V. B. Schofield, 3, Topsfield Road, Crouch End, N.
C. H. Thompson, 15, Holmby Street, Camberwell, S.E.
Mrs. Parsons, 58, Ridsdale Road, Anerley, S.E.
S. Small, 10, Rodney Street, Bute Terrace, Cardiff.

The other seven competitors whose names appear below failed in very minor details, and to each of them has been forwarded a penknife as a consolation prize:

Miss A. Starie, 6, Tyndale Terrace, Canonbury Square, N.
Miss M. E. Battiscombe, "One Elm," Cowley Road, Leytonstone.
T. Mason, Hawkhead Terrace, 31, Seedhill Road, Paisley.
W. Wharton, 3, Taylor Street, Weaste, near Manchester.
Mrs. Cooke, Fairview Heath End, Farnham, Surrey.
G. Trotter, 61, Brailsford Road, Tulse Hill, S.W.
F. Lees, 6, Edith Road, Peckham, S.E.

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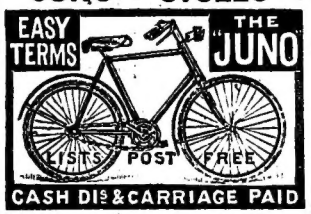

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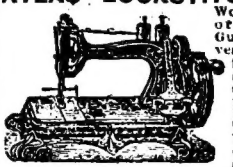

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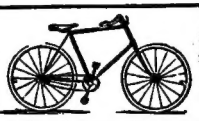

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